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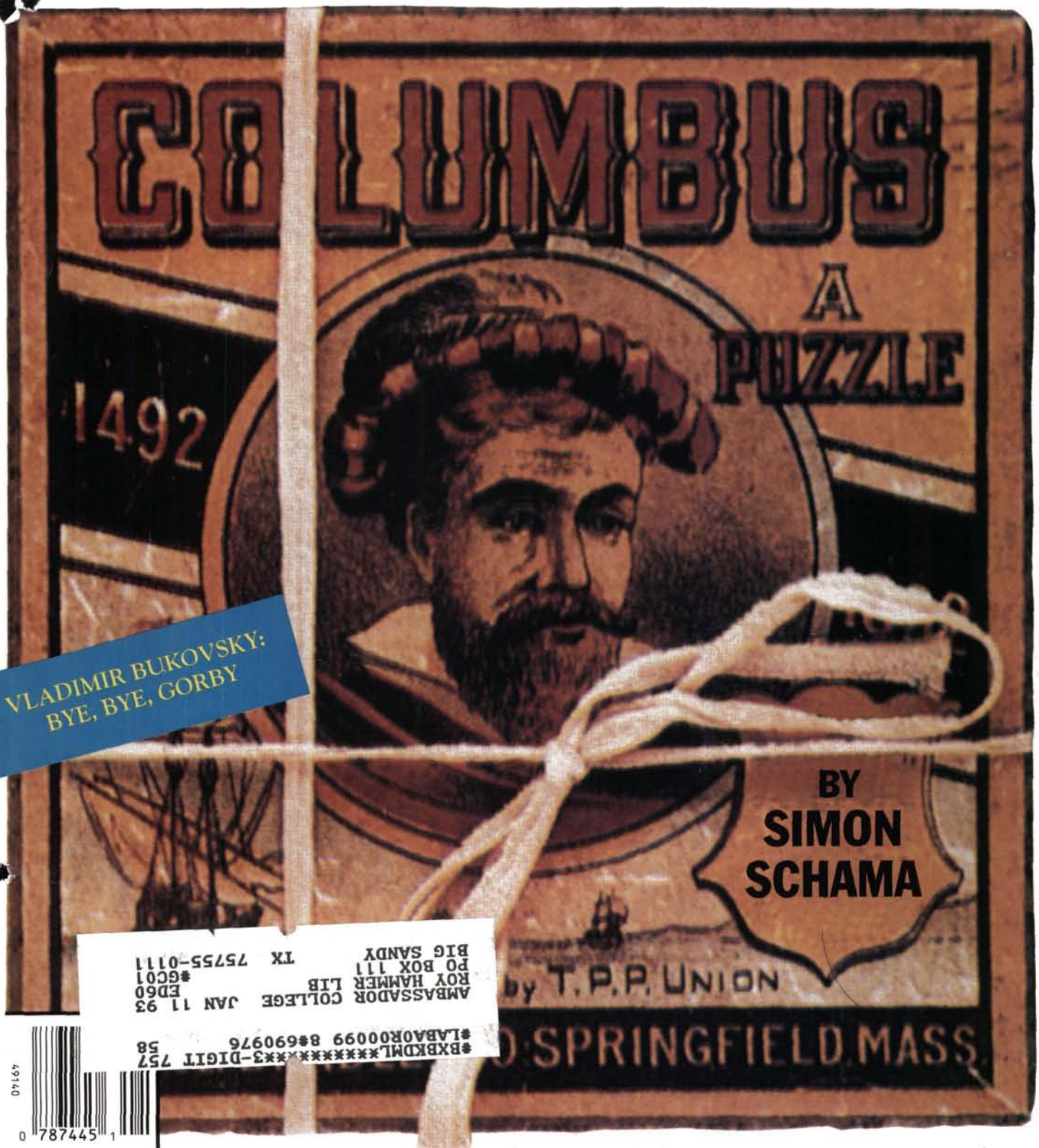
JANUARY 6 & 13, 1992 · $2.95

THE NEW REPUBLIC

On the Hill-Thomas dirt trail · Stealth fighters vs. Stealth bombers · English bigots



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The Higher Education Crisis

BY ALBERT SHANKER PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

How well are our students doing? People often answer this by saying that 50 percent of our students go on to college—which is more than in any other country. This sounds terrific. After all, college-bound students, here and abroad, are considered a nation's best, and if we're producing the world's highest percentage of top students, our education system must be tiptop. But numbers don't tell us whether the kids really know anything or whether they are going to college in order to get their high school (or junior high school) education. They don't address the question of standards.

A couple of weeks ago, I suggested that one way of doing this was to look at the exams college-bound students in some other industrialized nations take. What do students in Germany or France have to know and be able to do in order to get into college? What are the standards for their top students? And how do they stack up with what we ask of our college-bound kids in the SAT and ACT exams?

Compared with other countries, we don't ask for a lot—and we get even less. Students in other countries have to know subject matter, weigh evidence and write essays. Our kids have to pick out correct answers from lists. But while the percentage of kids who meet the demanding standards in these other countries is increasing, the percentage of our kids who meet a much laxer standard by getting top scores on the SATs has declined.

The average verbal SAT score at "selective" colleges has dropped 50 to 60 points in the last 25 years.

As Daniel J. Singal points out in "The Other Crisis in Education" (*The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1991), the average SAT verbal score at what are called selective colleges has dropped 50 to 60 points in the last 25 years. And it's not, as Singal says, "that these particular schools have slipped in their relative standings." The point is that "there has been a 40 percent decline in the proportion of students scoring over 600, [so] there are far fewer high-scoring students to go around."

What difference do these 60 lost points make? Singal, who teaches English at Hobart and William Smith, and teachers from other colleges with whom he spoke say one of the differences is that students are much poorer readers than they used to be: They catch less of what they read and remember less. Here's how Singal puts it: "So much escapes them; even those of above-average ability absorb no more than a dusting of detail from a printed text. And without such detailed information it's impossible for them to gain a real understanding of what the author is saying."

Students can't read as much as they used to, either. A teacher from the University of Michigan who remembers assigning one book a week during the 1960s now allows two to three weeks per book. And the books had better not be too hard: Most freshmen and sophomores, he says, can't even handle a journalist like Walter Lippmann.

If you can't read very well—or very much—you probably can't write very well. Even students at Harvard, who are the cream of the crop, have "very, very limited" vocabularies, according to the director of the expository writing program there, and their sentences don't often rise above the subject-predicate, subject-predicate model. Teachers in less prestigious schools might be delighted with this kind of simple-minded correctness; instead they are likely to get "mangled sentences, essays composed without the slightest sense of paragraphing, and writing that can't sustain a thought for more than half a page."

It's not just the language of these students that is feeble; their thinking skills are, too. They have a hard time, according to a teacher at Yale, thinking through an issue and using evidence to reach a conclusion. A 25-year veteran from Smith describes the problem this way: "Students come to us having sat around for twelve years expressing attitudes toward things rather than analyzing.... They are always ready to tell you how they feel about an issue, but they have never learned how to construct a rational argument to defend their opinions."

And the students don't know anything. Singal cites a teacher of American social history at Berkeley whose upper-level students can't always tell the difference between the American Revolution and the Civil War, which are, after all, just "two big events that happened way back in the past."

Does this really matter? People often claim that knowing facts is unimportant because you can always look them up in a reference book. But as Singal points out, there is an intimate connection between students' "deficit in factual knowledge and the decline in verbal skills": He says, "No matter how fascinating or valuable a new detail might be, a person finds it almost impossible to hold in memory and have available for retrieval unless it can be placed in some kind of larger context." So it's not surprising that kids who come to college not knowing anything about American history can't tell the Federalist Papers from the Dred Scott Decision—and can't think about them, either.

It's meaningless to talk about how many kids we send to college unless we also talk about the standards we have for them. And when we compare our college-entry exams with those in other countries or look at what our very best kids in our most selective colleges are able to do, it should be easy to resist the temptation to pat ourselves on the back.

MR. SHANKER'S COMMENTS APPEAR IN THIS AD UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS. READER CORRESPONDENCE IS INVITED. ADDRESS YOUR LETTERS TO MR. SHANKER AT THE AFT, 555 NEW JERSEY AVE., N.W., WASHINGTON, DC 20001. ©1991 BY ALBERT SHANKER.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

JANUARY 6 & 13, 1992

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WASHINGTON, D.C.
ISSUES 4,016 & 4,017

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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 205, Numbers 28 & 29, Issues 4,016 & 4,017, January 6 & 13, 1992. (Printed in the U.S. on December 18, 1991.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated Jan. 6 & 13, July 13 & 20, Aug. 17 & 24, and Sept. 7 & 14, 1992) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. The New Republic/ National Review joint advertising (212) 702-4882. Yearly subscriptions, $69.97; foreign, $99.97; Canada, $84.97. Back issues, $3.50 (includes postage & handling). © 1991 by The New Republic, Inc. (ISSN 0028-6583). Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Microform, CD-ROM, issue and article copies are available through University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone 1-800-521-0600. Member. Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Subscribers: Please send all remittances, changes of address, and subscription inquiries to Subscription Service Dept., The New Republic, P.O. Box 56515, Boulder, CO 80322. For subscription problems call 800-274-6686.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Simply idiotic

To the editors:

Some of Camille Paglia's criticisms of the report prepared by the Presbyterian Church on human sexuality are simply idiotic ("The Joys of Presbyterian Sex," December 2). Are we seriously meant to agree with her that the report is flawed because of its failure to incorporate the "voices ... of pederasts ... serial murderers, cannibals, Satanists, and the Ku Klux Klan"? Other comments reveal how little understanding she has of the role of religious institutions in many Americans' lives. For example, Paglia speaks contemptuously of the "helping" model underlying the report, suggesting it is "arrogant" for Church leaders to attempt to help others deal with sexual issues; yet many in this society do turn first to religious authorities when troubled by sexual matters. (Which is precisely why the *reception* of this quite progressive report among church leaders—a matter to which Paglia devotes barely a few lines—is so important.) Still other comments are grossly misinformed. The thousands of gays who are parenting their biological (as well as adopted) children will doubtless be interested in her sweeping statement that "gays must face the fact that ... they cannot reproduce themselves."

Readers of TNR deserve better than this.

CAROLE JOFFE
Davis, California

To the editors:

I have never read such unmitigated crap as the following lines from Camille Paglia's piece: "There may never be a world in which gay men are completely tolerated and in which women are completely safe. We must learn to accept limitation, duality, paradox." I, for one, will not accept definitions of my existence that are reductive or that deliberately exclude me. How radical is it to insist that all people—including women, gay men, lesbians—deserve the rights assumed by white, straight men?

I do not agree that it is an unalterable fact of life that women must accept violence or harassment from men. Much as Paglia would like to overlook and belittle this violence (she defends it as humor, irony, satire, and bawdiness), wife battering, rape, and gay bashing have reached epidemic proportions. The insidious mental attitudes that spring from this societal violence are equally widespread, as was aptly demonstrated during the Hill/Thomas hearings. What is funny about that? According to Paglia's arguments, if we can't dismiss it or excuse it, let's celebrate it in the name of Dionysus and the great traditions that form the wellspring of Western culture. Why? Why should anyone value a belief system that doesn't value him/her?

Paglia appears to need to disparage what is threatening to her worldview. Feminists are not didactic idiots intent on banishing "straight white men" from history and culture. What most feminists seek is pay parity, the right for women to choose when they will bear children, access to jobs and education. Feminists aren't unable to see the contributions men have made to culture, they simply argue that those male contributions aren't the whole story and shouldn't be presented as such.

If we all follow Paglia's route, there will indeed never come a day when gay men are tolerated and women are completely safe. Let's accept it and celebrate? No way. Strident conservatism, like strident feminism, is not a productive answer to the problems modern men and women face.

BETH FOSTER

To the editors:

Camille Paglia, not intimidated by the politically correct thinking bureaucracy of the church and its carefully selected committees, says what many long-suffering Presbyterians have been thinking for years: the emperor—in this case the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—has no intellectual or theological clothes on.

Paglia describes the document correctly: "Its language is banal, its ideas simplistic, its view of human nature naive and sentimental." This same critique could be applied to other major pieces coming from the church recently, including "A Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith," and a number of contemporary hymns in the new Presbyterian Hymnal.

It has taken a serious scholar to point out that *Keeping Body and Soul Together* is a foolish and intellectually inferior document, written by those who scorn the historical teachings of the church, ignore secular history, and engage in uncritical thinking and writing about the present day. The Presbyterian Church, rightly proud of its spiritual and intellectual heritage, has been greatly diminished. I think I did not realize how diminished until, to my shock and dismay, I read *Keeping Body and Soul Together* and Paglia's incisive, derisive critique.

WALTER B. FUNK
Princeton, New Jersey
The writer is a Presbyterian minister.

Stung

To the editors:

The Washington Diarist ("Primordial Ooze" by Jacob Weisberg, November 18) accuses Jack Healey of wrestling Amnesty International away from "its mission of quiet, effective casework."

When Peter Benenson founded Amnesty International in 1961, it was not for any quiet mission: it was to raise as many voices as possible to demand the release of prisoners of conscience. Few have done more in the past ten years to contribute to the growing scale and effectiveness of Amnesty's casework and research than Healey has done as executive director.

Research costs money. Amnesty is unique among human rights organizations in raising a constantly growing budget from the public without dependence on any dominant donors. Led by Healey, AIUSA has funded not only its own growth but a substantial proportion of the growth of our research and whole international program.

Casework needs activists. AIUSA's membership has grown from about 90,000 in 1981 to 400,000 today. Healey has taken Amnesty's human rights message across the towns and campuses of the United States. It has had all the more impact in Washington and beyond as a result.

The cause of human rights worldwide needs an ever-growing awareness among people of all ages and interests in all countries. Healey's signal contribution has been to use musicians to help reach half the world's population that is under 25 years old with a human rights message.

The "Washington Diarist" is concerned for Amnesty's effectiveness and seriousness of purpose. It is those of us who have that most at heart who best understand just how much Healey has contributed in ten years to enhance Amnesty's effectiveness—and how seriously committed he is to that purpose.

IAN MARTIN
London, England
The writer is secretary general of Amnesty International.

California budgetin'

To the editors:

Andrew Bates's article on state government ("Blame Game," November 4) misses a few salient facts about California.

He writes that Governor Pete Wilson didn't cut spending. It's true that next year's budget will increase. But this is only because of our rising caseload pop-

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ulation, not because of free-wheeling spending hikes. Grants to individuals have been cut. And we actually slashed $5 billion from the budget, rolling back welfare grants, reducing the state work force, trimming state employees' salaries by 5 percent, reforming the worker's compensation system, and suspending cost-of-living allowances.

Though it is true Governor Wilson was forced to raise taxes to close the budget gap he inherited—the biggest state budget gap in American history—he didn't raise income taxes on the middle class. He relied largely on a tax on discretionary spending—the sales tax. And one-third of that hike is temporary.

The problems of state government are more complex than Andrew Bates lets on. But we can set him straight if he'll give us a call next time.

BILL LIVINGSTONE
Sacramento, California

The writer is press secretary for Governor Pete Wilson.

To the editors:

Andrew Bates purports to prove that public employee unions are the cause of state government finance woes. But not only does he fail to provide any persuasive data showing that the number of public employees is the reason for the states' plight—he also misses the truth when presenting data to develop the case. For example, California, where fully one-eighth of the U.S. population resides, has seen a steady, demonstrable decrease in state employees-per-resident (from 9.9 per 1,000 residents to 8.8) since at least 1978. Citing only states like New York, where population growth is minimal, Bates ignores the significance of the largest state government.

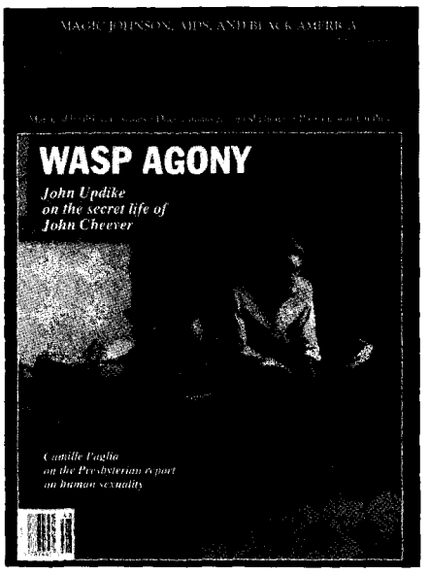
State governments also have historically paid wages significantly less than employers in the private sector, and the one consolation for these employees is civil service job security, a historical bargain that Bates dismisses as "archaic." The cavalier attitude notwithstanding, just how would Bates propose to get a work force at less than market rates without offering them *something* in return?

Bates's concerns over bumping rights, on the other hand, strike me as genuinely archaic. Civil service is not an evil concept, but was designed to prevent employees from being subject to just what Bates seems to advocate: capricious dismissal of veteran public servants according to the latest "quick fix" solution. Why shouldn't a senior civil engineer designing highways be allowed to demote in lieu of layoff? Apparently Bates believes that the careers of public employees aren't worth much—and in his scenario, they wouldn't be.

H. MATTSON AUSTIN
San Francisco, California

Andrew Bates replies:

I never charged that Governor Wilson gave in to "free-wheeling spending hikes." I said that his overall budget doesn't cut spending. Bob Strait of the California Department of Finance points out that spending increased by over 7 percent this year. The $5 billion allegedly slashed from the budget never existed. What was slashed, as Mr. Livingstone knows, was an inflated budget projection, a projected $5 billion in spending



increases. Governor Wilson may not have directly raised income taxes, but the average family of four is still going to pay an additional $1,000 in taxes in 1992; with his new tax package, the state's tax burden, as a percentage of personal income, is at its highest level ever. And the only state employees who have had their salaries cut by 5 percent were the state correctional officers, who voluntarily agreed to the cut and who constitute only 18,000 of the state's 150,000 employees. Governors' press offices are notorious for cooking their budget figures—that's why I didn't give Mr. Livingstone's office a call.

Posturing

To the editors:

Contrary to the views of Michael Kinsley ("Desert Storm," TRB, November 11), social conservatives have been completely consistent on the pornography issue, as applied to Clarence Thomas or anyone else.

On the particular case of Justice Thomas, we simply believe that scurrilous and unproven allegations should not be the occasion of a nominee's ruin. On pornography in general, we are fighting for the Pornography Victims Compensation Act of 1991. Some feminists have joined us on this, but most liberals stand loyally by the purveyors of hard-core obscenity and child pornography (the only types of materials reached by the bill).

While liberals in the Senate and the media were posturing about sexual harassment in the workplace, liberals in both houses were voting to allow the National Endowment of the Arts to fund materials that, if displayed in a workplace, would constitute sexual harassment.

One also has to wonder what the liberal party line is now on lie-detector tests. For years liberals fought them as instruments of deceit and oppression. Then Anita Hill took one, and suddenly they were infallible oracles.

We've just witnessed a major confirmation battle in which "the people rising" stood up for an unfairly maligned conservative nominee and got him confirmed. It's natural that liberals should be upset. What's puzzling is why Michael Kinsley expects me to believe nasty whispers about a friend.

GARY L. BAUER
Washington, DC

The writer is president of the Family Research Council.

Fifty-two Sundays

To the editors:

I appreciated Joe Klein's review of my book on Adam Clayton Powell Jr. ("Harlem Comes to Cotton," November 11), especially since he obviously uncovered new data I had missed. I was not aware, in spite of extensive research, that Congressman Powell "was forced to spend a decade of his life—except on Sundays—outside New York, for fear of being subpoenaed in a slander suit." I was under the impression, and so disclosed in the book, that it was approximately a year and a half. A slight difference to be sure, but apparently Mr. Klein has other "intelligence," which might suggest that readers take his many other strongly asserted opinions with equally appropriate gravity.

CHARLES V. HAMILTON
New York, New York

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FROM WASHINGTON

Taking exception

The Taking Clause of the Fifth Amendment ("nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation") is not one of your more fashionable constitutional freedoms. But it has a cult following among conservatives, who see it as the vehicle for a revival of so-called economic rights. "Economic rights" in this context does not mean anything so bleeding-heart as a right to food or shelter or a job. It means the right to conduct your business unmolested by the government.

The Supreme Court has taken a couple of Taking cases this term. By June, then, we should have an answer to the question that has been hanging over the Court for years. Once conservatives have a secure majority, will they be content to make good on their own rhetoric about "judicial restraint"? Or will they use the Court's power to impose their political agenda on the elected branches of government?

The legal issue is: When does government action short of actually seizing your property amount to the same thing, and therefore require compensation? In one of this year's cases, a man paid $975,000 for two beachfront lots in South Carolina. Before he could put up houses, the state rezoned the lots to forbid building. The lots are now worthless. The man argues, with some justice, that he is no better off than if the state had simply taken the land away—in which case the Constitution would have required that he be paid.

The fact that the two lots' market value was totally destroyed makes this an especially sympathetic case. But logically, the owner is no worse off than if, say, he'd owned four lots and a zoning change had reduced their value by half. If the government takes one of your ten acres of land, no one has any trouble seeing that as a "taking," even though you have nine acres left. How is it any different if the government does something that reduces the value of all ten acres by one-tenth?

As University of Chicago law professor Richard Epstein argues in his 1985 book, *Takings*, *any* government action that reduces the value of someone's private property can be defined as the total deprivation of *something*. Law students are taught that property ownership is, in fact, a "bundle of rights." If a person is told he can't build a building over a certain height, he has been denied his "air rights" just as completely as if the air rights were all he owned.

Or look at it this way (reasons Epstein). How is imposing a regulation that reduces the value of your property any different from taking that property away from you and then giving it back to you subject to the regulation? And yet the property at its new reduced value is clearly not "just compensation" for taking the property at its old full value.

Epstein is the godfather of the Taking Revival. Senator Joe Biden waved a copy of *Takings* with alarm in the Clarence Thomas hearings. But Epstein's thinking is actually more of a problem for Taking Clause enthusiasts than for skeptics. Epstein sees most of what the government now does as a violation of the Taking Clause: progressive taxation, all Social Security and welfare programs, virtually all regulations, in short any action by the government that burdens some citizens more than others. Most Taking cultists don't go so far. But Epstein's logic is rigorous. By contrast his halfhearted followers have no logical explanation for why and where they stop short.

It used to be conservatives who argued that constitutional provisions should be interpreted modestly and in line with the original understanding of the Framers. One such modest interpretation of the Taking Clause would be that it applies only to actual, physical seizures of property by eminent domain. That is what the Framers had in mind by "taking." Anything else is metaphor. And once you enter the land of metaphor, you are on a very slippery slope toward Epsteinism.

Attempts to define the limits of the Taking Clause have generated a vast scholarly literature, which can't be summarized here (mainly because I haven't read most of it). Past Supreme Court cases are a muddle. Much is made of the distinction between regulations aimed at preventing a public nuisance, like pollution, and those aimed at conferring a public benefit. But what is the difference? In the South Carolina case, the purpose of the zoning was to prevent beach erosion. Is that a nuisance or a benefit? And why should the landowner be paid all or nothing at all based on such a shadowy distinction?

The Supreme Court has held that a "permanent physical invasion" is a taking, no matter how small. Thus when New York City required apartment building owners to allow cable TV wiring—a trivial imposition that, if anything, enhanced the buildings' value—that was a "taking." But when the city forbade the owner of Grand Central Station to build an office tower above it—which reduced the property's value by hundreds of millions—the owner was out of luck.

If the Court starts defining many government regulations as "takings" requiring compensation, those regulations will become unaffordable and will have to be abandoned. That, of course, is the conservative agenda. But good liberals must take the Bill of Rights seriously, including the parts that are inconvenient. The Taking Clause, like the Second Amendment, is one of these.

In one sense property rights are more at risk from the tyranny of the majority than the liberty rights civil libertarians usually concern themselves with. The distribution of property, unlike the distribution of liberty, is a zero-sum game. More freedom of speech for me need not mean less for you. But if 51 percent of the citizenry decides to vote itself more property, that property can only come from the other 49 percent. That is the abuse the Taking Clause is intended to prevent.

Nevertheless, my liberal heart does not bleed much for the "victims" of democratically enacted government regulations. Taking Clause enthusiasts overlook its one-sidedness. What about the many situations where government actions *increase* the value of someone's private property? Zoning is a classic example. The South Carolina saga is often reversed: a zoning change will add millions to the value of some property. Yet there is no constitutional mechanism for society to recoup that value. (Epstein would say that this too is an unconstitutional "taking"—from everybody else except the landowner. But, as I noted, few of Epstein's followers actually follow him over the cliff of logical consistency.)

It is a characteristic flaw of the American mind-set to be overly concerned with discreet injustices and not concerned enough with the injustice of life in general. Thus we have an overblown medical malpractice law and no national health insurance. In the (worthy) cause of reducing litigiousness, conservatives want to make it harder for people harmed by private fault to sue for compensation. Yet they don't worry about the swamp of litigiousness that would open up if people could sue whenever they were affected in any material way by a government regulation for the common good. Is the man whose land value is reduced through zoning more to be pitied than the man who has no land to begin with?

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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JANUARY 6 & 13, 1992

FROM MAASTRICHT TO MINSK

The acronyms pile up. To the EC, whose officials have perfected the art of acronymic discourse, we now have the honor of adding the CIS, the Commonwealth of Independent States, which sounds more like a Washington think tank than a profound event in world history. But the intimation of these contraptions is clear enough. The nation-state in a whole swath of the planet is allegedly being phased away in favor of a new kind of arrangement. And Americans, whose understanding of nationhood has long been exceptional, are invited to acquiesce, even to assist.

Should we? This is now more than an academic question—but it begs another one. What most commentators have missed is that both the EC and the CIS are proof less of the decay of the nation-state than of its resilience. The CIS was born out of desperate self-interest, as the newly emergent countries of the old Soviet empire realized that they faced economic collapse without some modicum of cooperation. Ukraine signed not out of some blithe desire for a new form of sovereignty, but in order to avoid paying vastly higher sums for basic Russian resources. Kazakhstan swallowed its nationalist pride, and having been originally excluded from the deal, joined in.

This realism is both the limitation of the new arrangement and its surest foundation. It gives the lie to those, including George Bush, who equated nationalism with suicidalism or irrationality. Some nationalism is suicidal (or more precisely, murderous); but not all nationalism. And nationalism is rarely irrational. More often the opposite is true: an effective nation-state, more than many other forms of government, is able to act effectively out of self-interest, even if that requires an element of cooperation with others. When the Soviet Union died, "the center" died with it—but not the sense that centralization of some kind is required to coordinate the new lives of these sovereign, indigent, and heavily armed states. Central government from Moscow was no longer tolerable, but a new center in Minsk was responsibly established. These new states have shown again the important historical difference between sovereignty voluntarily limited and sovereignty involuntarily stolen.

The same truth underlies the deal at Maastricht, which was in the end a sensible blend of pragmatism and nationalism. A single currency is the natural consequence of a continent that is already integrated economically, and in which the majority of exchange rates are already firmly aligned. The only risk is if the German Bundesbank loses control of the European Central Bank and therefore of the soundness of the European currency, and Maastricht gave no serious signs of that. As for future deadlines for unity in foreign and defense policy, they are likely to be broken if they seriously breach national self-interest, as the wrangle over EC recognition of Croatia swiftly demonstrated.

The genius of the European Community, after all, has long been its ability to cloak national self-interest in the mantle of collective will. But unveil the arrangement a little and its real nature is clear. France sees it as a way finally to exclude Anglo-Saxon influence from its continent; Germany, as a means to flex international power without invoking the specter of German history; Italy, as a device to enhance its international stature; Spain as an antidote to its authoritarian past; the smaller countries—Ireland, Scotland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal—as a less threatening authority than their nearest power: Britain, England, France, and Spain respectively. Only London has qualms—and precisely because alone among the nation-states, England's self-interest is obviously served by an Atlantic connection, both vis-à-vis its own subject mini-nations (Ulster, Scotland, Wales) and its continental rivals.

The nation-state and its accompaniment, nationalism, are far from dead, even if they are now inhabiting more amorphous associations. Nor are they inherently "irrational," for all the glib references to the Balkans. If allowed autonomy (which Serbia denied Croatia), nations *can* be a benign basis for broader international cooperation, and need not degenerate into cultural or ethnic narcissism. And if the EC can recognize the independent states that once constituted Yugoslavia, we see no reason why the United States cannot. The American interest lies in promoting institutions that accept responsible nationalism and build on it. For all the high-minded rhetoric about a new Eurostate, Maastricht produced just such an institution; and for all the dark talk about impending collapse in the shell of the old

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Soviet Union, a similar arrangement emerged in Minsk.

American policy toward the EC should now shift from an indiscriminating support for further integration toward a discriminating policy in favor of an open European market and a defense structure with close links to the United States. This may mean an attempt to undermine the Franco-German axis within the EC, which has been the force behind agricultural protectionism and excluding the new democracies of Eastern Europe. So be it. The easy stage of U.S.-EC relations is now over.

With the CIS, there's no reason to delay diplomatic recognition for the association, which can no longer be dismissed as a merely Slavic entity. Recognition entails few risks, and it might galvanize an essentially responsible development. As for material succor, the administration's current aid plans—for dismantling former Soviet nuclear warheads, for food and technological assistance—is about as generous as prudence currently demands, and is being supplemented by a hefty dollop from the EC. As John Lloyd makes clear elsewhere in this issue (see "C.I.S.O.S.," page 18), the current situation is still so confused that any more ambitious commitment is rash. But one area of aid is still outstanding: funds for ruble stabilization. Without a stable currency, the Yeltsin reforms now being agreed to by the other CIS republics run the risk of collapse, from lack of confidence. The G-7 countries gave $1 billion to Poland for such purposes: it is still in the Polish central bank, its prime function—confidence-boosting—performed. Whatever's needed for such confidence in the CIS—probably around $3 billion from the United States—should be given. We owe it to the new, democratic leaders of the East to provide it.

Until now, any of this assistance would have been pointless, a mere prop for a regime of massive incompetence and negligible legitimacy. We strongly opposed aid then, just as we strongly favor it now. In 1992 the bare bones of accountability are in place and the possibility of renewal is visible. Gorbachev—the last tie to decades of decay and brutality—has gone. It is no time for the United States to disappear with him.

NOTEBOOK

BUSHISM OF THE WEEK: "I am less interested in what the definition is. You might argue technically, are we in a recession or not. But when there's this kind of sluggishness and concern—definitions, heck with it."
—December 17, figuring out if there's a recession or not

HOUSE OF ILL REPUTE WATCH: Simon and Schuster's latest product sets a new benchmark for authorial distance. Basketball star Charles Barkley was so outraged by passages from his own autobiography, *Outrageous*, excerpted in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, that he tried to block its release. His complaint? He'd been "misquoted" in his own book. His excuse? Not that he hadn't written it in the first place, but that he'd submitted the work to his publisher without even reading the galleys, trusting entirely the judgment of "co-author" Roy S. Johnson. Later, he waxed philosophical: "That's going to happen anytime you write a book, so I just have to deal with the heat." But the real prize goes to S&S, who may have pulled off the feat of having an author fail to read a book before he failed to write it.

HYPERDEFLATION:

Soviet bread price up 600%

—*The Seattle Times*, November 13, morning edition

Soviet bread price up 500%

—same paper, same day, evening edition
(thanks to Leroy W. Demery Jr., Winslow, Washington)

AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR: With this issue, our economics editor, Robert Kuttner, becomes a contributing editor, as he devotes more time to his quarterly, *The American Prospect*. This special Christmas issue of THE NEW REPUBLIC is also a double issue. The editors will be spending their week off brushing up on their economics. The next double issue is in July. •

Muscovites face the future.

COMA IN THE SNOW

By Hendrik Hertzberg

MOSCOW

On the presumably historic day when the presidents of the republics of Russia, Byelorussia, and Ukraine got together to proclaim the death of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the birth of the Commonwealth of Independent States, thus transforming the city of Minsk from a Borscht Belt joke into the capital-designate of the largest contiguous political entity on earth, Petya Aleshkovsky, a Moscow belletrist in his mid-30s, accomplished something of more immediate interest. He managed to buy a two-liter bottle of cooking oil after standing in line for only two hours. He joined the line at 7:30 a.m. after getting a telephone tip from a friend. The temperature was some degrees below freezing. The winter's first snow was fresh on the pavement.

That evening my colleague Anna Husarska and I had

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dinner at Petya's apartment. In four narrow, high-ceilinged rooms live Petya and his wife, Tamara; their daughter and son, ages 8 and 6; Petya's 91-year-old grandmother; and Tamara's mother, who is 65. Six people in four rooms is about average for a Soviet apartment. (The apartments are still Soviet, even if the Union is not.) The rooms are small, but they seem even smaller because there is so much stuff in them. People save everything that might conceivably be useful someday—bottles, rubber bands, bits of cloth—because you can't just nip out and buy whatever it is. In the streets, everyone is a hunter-gatherer; at home, everyone is a squirrel.

We warmed up with tea in the study that doubles as Petya and Tamara's bedroom. The walls were covered with shelves crammed with books in English and Spanish as well as in Russian. The shelves were glassed-in, more for the protection of the people than the books. During the "stagnation time" Soviet bookbinders used a glue that goes rancid; it'll stink up the room unless you seal it off. At my request, Petya outlined the family finances. Tamara, a schoolteacher, earns 700 rubles a month. The two grandmothers have monthly pensions of 185 rubles each. Petya himself used to work, he said, as a "street weeper"—the pun was unintentional, but he quickly turned it into a running gag—at 100 rubles a month, but now he has no regular income. That's 1,070 rubles a month, plus the occasional couple of hundred Petya sometimes gets for a piece of writing. It's not much for six people. How much? Well, you can still get a loaf of excellent black bread for 60 kopecks, take a ride on the Metro for 15 kopecks, and make a local call at a phone box for two kopecks—which is to say, for 0.02 cents. But on the street, where prices are set by market forces, a kilo of bananas costs 70 rubles, a kilo of meat 100, a bottle of generic cognac 350, a pack of cigarettes 35, a red rose 25. These are the prices people think about when they try to imagine the future.

Petya's work has appeared in *Ogonyok*, *Novy Mir*, and *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. Had he been born in New York instead of Moscow, his wife might be making upward of $40,000 a year in the New York City public school system, and he might be publishing his fiction in *The New Yorker* and reviewing books for *Newsday*. But because he was born in Moscow, he stands in line for a living. The hours in lines, he said, are of considerable human interest, especially the vodka lines, but they rob him of precious writing time.

At 10 o'clock we interrupted our dinner to watch the news on all-Union television. The bulbous little screen of the Aleshkovskys' TV set showed the determined faces of President Yeltsin of Russia, President Kravchuk of Ukraine, and parliamentary chairman Shushkevich of Byelorussia, and the stricken face of President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, who, that first day, had been humiliatingly stiffed by his Slavic brothers. "The three Slavic states getting together," Petya remarked. "This is exactly what Solzhenitsyn advocated." Someone pointed out that the Cyrillic acronym for the new Commonwealth sounds like the Russian words for "snow" or "coma," depending on how you pronounce it.

The next day, taking a walk in downtown Moscow, Petya, Anna, and I caught sight of a demonstration in the distance. Demonstrations are routine in post-Communist Moscow; what was unusual about this one was that the marchers were carrying long red banners, complete with hammer and sickle. We followed the crowd to an elegant old house that now serves as the Latvian Embassy. There, from a wooden platform, speakers denounced the Jews and railed shrilly against the Latvian government's imprisonment of a Soviet officer for directing last year's bloody suppression of independence supporters. The crowd was around 500 strong, mostly people in their 50s or older, mostly well dressed—plenty of fur hats and collars. At the edge of the crowd, a man with a magic marker was editing graffiti. Someone had scrawled DOWN WITH LENINISM several times on the wall. The man was methodically crossing out LEN and writing in YELTS.

People carried hand-lettered signs. LENIN LIVES, LENIN WILL ALWAYS LIVE, said one. YELTSIN IS THE SLAVE, BUSH IS THE MASTER, said another. STOP THE AMERICANIZATION OF THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE. THE LIBERALIZATION OF PRICES WILL MEAN THE DEATH OF MILLIONS. We stopped to talk with a woman whose sign was closely covered with writing. "There are special spies," she explained. "They kill people. For example, one of my friends died. They said it was from an unknown disease, but I know it was from the poison that is everywhere." Moving on, we spoke with a pleasant-looking, fiftyish couple who had been raising their fists and shouting their approval. "His mother is Armenian," said the woman, pointing to her husband. "My mother is Russian. We have other family in Georgia. Now we will need visas to visit our own relatives. What kind of nonsense is that?"

Leaving the demonstration, we continued our walk, speculating about how the death of the Union was being taken outside Moscow. By way of explaining that events in the capital are not always clearly understood in the hinterland, Petya told us a joke. A Chukcha (a person from Kamchatka, in remote Siberia) comes home from his once-in-a-lifetime visit to Moscow. "Comrades," he tells his friends, "everything we've been told all these years is all wrong! Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are not husband and wife after all! They're *four different people!*"

We barely had time to savor the Dadaist flavor of this before Petya was telling us another. Kravchuk is presiding over the Ukrainian Parliament, trying to decide what speaker to recognize. At microphone No. 1 is a nationalist extremist. "I'd better not call on him," Kravchuk thinks. "He'll just say all the Russians should be hanged." At microphone No. 2 is an anti-Semite. "Not him either," Kravchuk thinks. "He'll say all the Jews should be drowned." At microphone No. 3 is a member of the Green party. "Ah," thinks Kravchuk. "An environmentalist. This will be good for our multiparty image." Microphone No. 3 is recognized. "Gentlemen," says the speaker, "our environment is in crisis. We face an unprecedented ecological catastrophe. The trees are all

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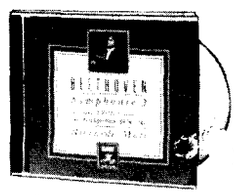
Mstislav Rostropovich— Return To Russia (Sony Classical) 428·151

Jean-Pierre Rampal— Mozart (Sony Classical) 426·270



Beethoven: Symphony No. 3 (Eroica); Overtures. Riccardo Muti, cond. (EMI) 424·283

TAKE ANY 8 COMPACT

Midori—Live At Carnegie Hall (Sony Classical) 420·570

Berlioz: Symphonie Fantastique; **Dvorak:** New World Symphony. Ormandy, Phila. Orch. (Sony Classical) 429·860

Tchaikovsky: Sleeping Beauty; Swan Lake; plus Respighi, Adam, etc. Ormandy, Phila. Orch. (Sony Classical) 429·852

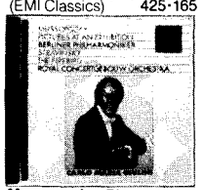
Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No. 1; Violin Concerto—also concertos —by Grieg and Schumann. Ormandy, Phila. Orch. (Sony Classical) 429·845

Richard Strauss: An Alpine Symphony; Horn Concerto No. 1. Mehta, Berlin Philharmonic (Sony Classical) 407·197

Schubert: Symphonies No. 1 & 8 (Unfinished). Ruccardo Muti, cond. (EMI Classics) 427·047

Chopin: Piano Concertos No. 1 & 2; Polonaises, etc. Alexander Brailowsky (Newport Classic) 429·811

Ravel: Piano Concertos in D & G; more. Cecile Ousset, piano; Rattle, Birmingham Symphony (EMI Classics) 425·165



Mussorgsky: Pictures At An Exhibition; **Stravinsky:** The Firebird. —Giulini, Berlin Philharm., Royal Concertgebouw (Sony Classical) 413·625

Sibelius: Symphonies Nos. 4 & 5. Lorin Maazel, Pittsburgh Sym. Orch. (Sony Classical) 425·199

Corigliano: Symphony No. 1. Barenboim, cond. (Erato) 426·262

Vivaldi: Concerti. Menuhin, Polish Chamber (EMI Classics) 425·157

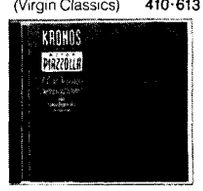
Maria Callas—Opera Arias. Tullio Serafin, cond. (Angel) 400·218

Mozart: Symphonies 40 & 41. Tate, English Chamber Orchestra (Angel) 423·327

Chopin: Polonaises. Alfred Brendel (Vanguard Classics) 422·980

Liszt: Hungarian *Rhapsodies*; plus others. Alfred Brendel (Vanguard Classics) 422·931

Rachmaninov: Symphony #3; Symphonic Dances. Litton, Royal Philharm. (Virgin Classics) 410·613



Kronos Quartet—Astor Piazzolla: Five Tango Sensations (Elektra/Nonesuch) 416·586

Brahms: Symphony No. 2; Haydn Variations. Sawallisch, London Phil. (Angel) 423·921

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Maurice Andre—Classical Trumpet Concerto— Haydn, Mozart, Bellini & Hummel (Angel) 419·648

Brahms: Symphony No. 1. Dohnanyi, Cleveland Orch. (Teldec) 419·432

Prokofiev: Symphonie Concertante; **Shostakovich:** Cello Concerto. Rostropovich; Ozawa, cond. (Erato) 419·390

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Chopin: Nocturnes. Ivan Moravec, pianist (Elektra/Nonesuch) 418·236

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Ransom Wilson/Manuel Barrueco—Mozart: Duets For Flute & Guitar (Angel) 417·352

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Steve Reich—The Four Sections; more (Elektra/Nonesuch) 416·651

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Copland: The Tender-land—Opera in 3 Acts (Virgin Classics) 414·375/394·379

Roger Norrington— Mendelssohn: Symphonies No. 3 (Scotch), No. 4 (Italian). London Classical Players (Angel) 414·110

Richard Strauss: *Till* Eulenstiegel; Ein Heldenleben. Barenboim, Chicago Sym. (Erato) 422·915

Various Artists—The Concert Of The Century (Sony Classical) 420·588

Roger Norrington— Schubert: Symphonies No. 5 & 8. (Unfinished). London Classical Players (Angel) 414·102

Roger Norrington— Schumann: Symphonies Nos. 3 & 4. London Classical Players (Angel) 414·094

Christopher Parkening/ David Brandon—Virtuoso Duets (Angel) 413·823

Brahms: The Piano Quartets Op. 25, 26, & 60. Ax/Stern/Laredo/Ma(Sony Classical) 413·724/393·728

Stravinsky: Concerto For Piano & Wind Instruments; Capriccio For Piano; etc. Crossley; Salonen, cond. (Sony Classical) 412·460

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Andre Kostelanetz & His Orch.—Puccini Without Words (CBS) 414·706

Cole Porter: Kiss Me Kate. First recording of the full score. McGlinn, cond. (Angel) 413·773/393·777

Florence Quivar—Ride On, King Jesus! (Angel) 413·583

Various Artists—Mozart Goes To A Party (CBS Master.) 412·452

John Williams, Boston Pops Orch.—Music Of The Night; Pops On Broadway 1990 (Sony Classical) 405·993

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Cole Porter: Anything Goes. McGlinn, London Symphony & Ambrosian Chorus(Angel) 401·620

The Bernstein Songbook —Selections from West Side Story, On The Town, etc. (CBS) 371·088

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New York Vocal Arts Ensemble—Johann Strauss II: Waltzes For Singing. Raymond Beegle (Arabesque) 378·620

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The Movies Go To The Opera. Callas, Gedda, etc. (Angel Studio) 372·342

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The Jazz Album— Simon Rattle, London Sinfonietta; Peter Donohoe, piano; Harvey & The Wallbangers. A Delight! (Angel) 362·004

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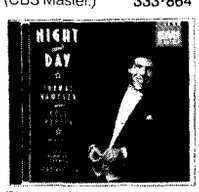
Andrew Lloyd Webber: Requiem. Brightman, Domingo; Maazel, cond. (Angel) 338·814

Brahms' Greatest Hits— Bernstein, Entremont, etc. (CBS Master.) 333·864



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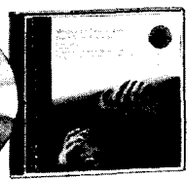
Andres Segovia, Guitar—The Segovia Collection, Vol. 9, Romantic Guitar (MCA Classics) 424·010



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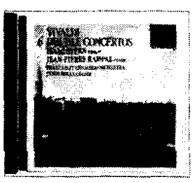

Issac Stern & Jean-Pierre Rampal—Vivaldi: 6 Double Concertos (Sony Classical) 417·535

Domus—Brahms: Piano Quartet No. 2 Mahler: Piano Quartet Movement (Virgin Classics) 383·133

Daniel Barenboim, conductor—Das Konzert Nov. 1989. Berlin Phil. (Sony Classical) 408·005

New Year's Concert 1990. Mehta,Vienna Phil. (Sony Classical) 407·189

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dying. The lakes are all drying up. I ask you: Where will we hang the Russians? Where will we drown the Jews?"

When it was time to part, I asked Petya if he was hopeful about the future. "Not hopeful, exactly," he said, "but not hopeless, either. Since the coup this no longer feels so much like an abnormal country, a freak of nature. It feels like a normal country that has very, very serious problems." And he disappeared into the Metro, with the pound of coffee, the bottle of children's vitamins, and the copy of *The New York Review of Books* I'd given him tucked under his arm. •

NEW YORK POSTCARD

QUALITY OF LIFE

By Jim Holt

Last year New York police handed out something like 70,000 summonses for "quality of life" violations: low-level drug possession, three-card monte swindling, prostitution, disorderly conduct, urinating in public, turnstile jumping, and so forth. One of them was received by a friend of mine. I shall call him John, for that is his name. John was caught in Washington Square Park on the Fourth of July with a small amount of what was alleged to be marijuana in his possession. The officer who issued the summons told John he'd been fingered by the dealer who'd sold it to him for $20, and that what he'd purchased was probably not even the real item. Rum.

I felt sorry for John, a civil type who had a serious suit-and-tie job near Wall Street. It seemed a shame for him to waste a morning hanging around a courthouse. So, having nothing in particular to do on the day of the hearing, I offered to impersonate him and go in his stead. He acceded to this with real glee, in spite of its probable illegality. He gave me a couple of crisp $100 bills in case I should have to pay a fine in his behalf.

I arrived early and took a seat on a bench in the entrance hall of the courthouse. On the closed door of the hearing room a sign was posted proscribing various activities within, among them "reading." Presently the judge appeared, dressed in a seersucker suit instead of the expected judicial robes. He sat in front of a flag, and a sign saying "IN GOD WE TRUST," and a large clock that was missing a hand. Around three dozen people were waiting to be arraigned; only one was a woman, rather smartly attired. About half of those whose names were called had not shown up; warrants for their arrest would supposedly be issued. Among the rest of us there was a collective feeling of suckership. The judge told us we had three plea options: guilty, not guilty, and guilty with explanation. Those who pleaded "not guilty" would be given trials on another date.

The first defendant plumped for the "guilty with an explanation" plea, so I was able to learn a little more about its logic. The charge was urinating in public. What was the explanation? the judge wanted to know. The poor fellow, speaking in a very small voice, said the officer who had issued his summons had not read him his rights. The judge greeted this with derision. The defendant then said it was not he who was urinating in the alley, but one of his companions. This seemed a slight improvement over the first line of defense. But the judge would have none of it, pointing out that it amounted to a "not guilty" plea. Finally the guy simply said that he had had to go to the bathroom very badly—he had reached the "busting point," as he put it—and there were no rest rooms around. Here was an explanation the judge could identify with. The defendant got off with a $5 fine.

Next up was an old duffer who turned out to be a hansom driver in Central Park. A policeman told the court that he had issued the fellow a summons for failing to aid his lame horse after it had fallen on its side. When asked what he had to say to this, the defendant got abusive and denied everything. Regarding him with obvious dislike, the judge fined him $50, whereupon he shouted that his family would starve if he had to pay the fine. As one of the court officers escorted him to the door, the judge suggested he consider welfare.

What a contrast to the next defendant, a courtly Asian gentleman in a suit and tie who was charged with smoking in a public space. He pleaded guilty, received a $25 fine, bowed, and departed the scene. He was followed by an elflock-coiffed Rasta-man. The charge was disorderly conduct. A "known drug dealer," according to the cop who'd come to testify, he had grown unruly when the police tried to evict him from Washington Square Park. The judge dismissed the charge in a peremptory fashion, saying that no prima facie case for disorderly conduct had been made. As he left the courtroom, the heretofore silent defendant let out a yelp of triumph that could have brought a bit of plaster down from the ceiling.

As the morning wore on, I began to observe a pattern. About a dozen of the defendants were accompanied by attorneys. One after another, the charges against them were dismissed, on the grounds that the summons they had been issued was "defective." Now, I am sure that lawyers are skilled at spotting the more subtle sorts of defects that might vitiate a summons, but most of these were fairly glaring. Typically the issuing officer had not bothered to sign the thing. As a citizen, I was disillusioned to observe this incompetence. As a surrogate defendant, however, I was cheered. I pulled out the little pink document that John had given me. The officer's signature was legible enough, alas, and the legend "Unlawful Poss Mari," though cryptic, seemed susceptible of only one interpretation.

I tried to formulate an explanation that might mitigate the crime. Medicinal purposes? I did not look anorexic, nor could I pass myself off as suffering from

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glaucoma. Might I claim extenuation from the fact that everybody of my generation used marijuana occasionally? No—I was not, after all, a Supreme Court nominee. Perhaps I could say I had been planning to smoke it on my yacht outside of U.S. territorial waters, as William Buckley once took the trouble of doing; but this might excite the envy of a decidedly non-U judge. There remained the argument that a right to possess and consume small amounts of marijuana could be inferred from the general right to privacy that was guaranteed by the Constitution; unfortunately, I could not recall which amendment mentioned this right.

Finally the name on the summons I held was called. Arriving at the bench, I fixed the judge in the eye. "Guilty with an explanation!" I declared.

"And your explanation?" he replied.

"Well, isn't there a reasonable doubt that the stuff I purchased was in fact marijuana? I mean, even the officer who gave me the summons said it was probably oregano or something."

"Then, Mr. X, you are a bigger fool than you look," he riposted, eliciting undisguised mirth from the court officers around me.

I was in no mood for this sort of sarky banter. I felt like pointing out to the judge that perhaps *he* was the fool, considering I had gulled him into believing I was "Mr. X" in the first place. But that would not have been prudent. So I humbly nodded my head.

"Besides," the judge went on, "that's not an explanation."

The gist of this got past me. I asked for elucidation.

"If you want to say that you didn't really have marijuana, you must plead 'not guilty' and be tried on another date."

Thinking this would almost certainly require me to produce identification, I declined the option.

"A hundred dollar fine. Next case!"

I was chagrined, but I cloaked my emotions as I retreated from the bench. And on my way to the cashier, my mood brightened. After all, I had dished out the repartee pretty well in my encounter with the judge. I grandly peeled off a crisp $100 bill to pay the fine, as befitted a drug defendant, and was on my way.

There remains the question of whether there was anything unethical about my imposture. I do not think so. Look at it this way. My friend John was better off for not having to spend a tedious morning in court. I was better off for undergoing a novel experience that I could write about. The judge was better off for having an opportunity to make a waggish crack at my expense. And society, in its ignorance, was unaffected. Thus no individuals were made worse as a result of my action, and some were made better off. In social justice theory I think that this is called a "Pareto improvement." On top of it all, I discovered why the quality of life in New York is not very good. It is because the police here do not know how to fill out a summons.

JIM HOLT is a New York writer.

America vs. third parties.

PARTY POOPER

By Matthew Levie

Americans are less partisan today than ever before. Independents are now the largest political grouping in America: in 1988, according to the National Elections Center at the University of Michigan, 37 percent of Americans labeled themselves independents, 36 percent Democrats, and 28 percent Republicans. In 1952, by comparison, 47 percent of those polled said they were Democrats, 27 percent Republicans, and only 23 percent independents. What's more, according to an ABC/*Washington Post* poll, more than 40 percent of voters don't see any important differences in what the major parties stand for.

For some, these statistics suggest a deep corruption of the body politic; for others, merely a sign that the major parties need an overhaul. But there's a more obvious reason for the ennui: the American system is an extremely bland one when it comes to the choice between political parties. Almost every other advanced democracy has a myriad of parties from which to choose; all add to the national debate and foster greater participation. Even stodgy old Britain has a major third party, the Liberal Democrats, a distant descendant of the Liberals of the last century. In the U.S. there's no third party. And the system is geared to preventing one from forming.

Of the most recent attempts, the New Party (tentatively named), founded on September 15 by the National Organization for Women, will doubtless meet the fate of its forerunners. (So far, the party has only a wacky, populist-isolationist tone. It has no platform, no organization, and no candidates.) America's third-largest party, the Libertarian Party, has not received more than 1.1 percent of the national vote since its inception in 1971. Its agenda includes turning defense into a national charity. John Anderson, the only mainstream independent presidential candidate in two decades, had the support—in polls—of more than 15 percent of the electorate, but won only 6.6 percent of the vote.

Our electoral system has never embraced independent and third-party candidates, and the deterrents now are greater than ever. The most obvious one is the advantage given to candidates who sign up in either party's primaries. Since 1968 delegate selection rules have become more democratic, and outsiders sensibly choose to go the mainstream route, qualifying for federal government "matching funds" in the old organizations.

The trouble is that the outsiders are almost always devoured by the mainstream, once the election process

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gets under way. Under the illusion of greater openness lies the trap of co-optation. The Republicans still have "winner-take-all" primaries that favor the front-runner; the Democrats still have "superdelegates" who are likely to. Independent candidates are lured into the race, only to be tripped up in the homestretch. Furthermore, primary voters are a very small segment of the population (in 1988, 34 percent of eligible Democrats and 22 percent of eligible Republicans), mostly the party faithful. The electorate most naturally sympathetic to an independent candidate is excluded from voting for her.

Setting up your own third party is a democrat's nightmare. The first hurdle is getting your name on the November ballot. Democrats and Republicans need only name their candidate; others have to collect thousands of signatures. Some states charge "verification fees" for each signature, and others charge "filing fees" for declaring candidacy. These requirements are not impossible to meet: in 1988 Lenora Fulani (New Alliance Party) was on the ballot in every state, and Ron Paul (Libertarian) in forty-six of them. But they do put third-party candidates at a disadvantage. The Libertarians had to spend one-fourth of their 1988 budget of $2 million on ballot access.

Which brings us to the funding hurdle. In 1992 the Democrats and Republicans will each receive a federal grant of more than $55 million to conduct their campaigns, courtesy of the Federal Election Campaign Act. To be eligible for any portion of the subsidy, you have to get 5 percent of the vote (25 percent to get the full $55 million), and unless you qualified in the last round, it isn't received until after the election. Anderson got ex post facto federal funding, but it came too late to do him any good. Needless to say, it's hard to get 5 percent of the vote without money. Bush and Dukakis each spent $1 million on election eve alone for a half-hour commercial on all three networks; $1 million is the Libertarian Party's entire campaign budget for 1992.

The news media represent the third hurdle. Not surprising, they focus on the big names and give the upstarts short shrift. The only way to get the attention that outsiders are generally denied is to propound extremist or silly views. That's one reason why David Duke did so well, and why the Libertarians once ran a prostitute for governor of California. This also goes for establishment party candidates who are given hopeless odds by the pundits. Pierre Rinfret—New York Governor Mario Cuomo's Republican opponent in 1990—declared that he favored chemical castration for rapists.

You also won't get a chance to debate the mainstream candidates. Anderson met the criteria set by the League of Women Voters, which used to sponsor the presidential debates, but he still got nixed by President Carter. In fact, no third-party candidate has ever been included. The Commission on Presidential Debates, which now sponsors the debates, claims it will include any candidate with a reasonable chance of winning, although it's headed by former chairmen of the Republican and Democratic National Committees. It refuses to disclose the criteria on which it based its decision to exclude third parties in 1988.

Does it have to be this difficult? Britain and Canada have the same electoral system as we do, but each has a far more diverse political spectrum. There are five mostly serious parties in the British House of Commons, if you count Welsh and Scottish nationalists, and three in the Canadian. Both Canada and Britain make it easy for smaller parties to get funded, heard, and on the ballot. Canada reimburses any parliamentary candidate who gets 15 percent of the vote in his district for 50 percent of his expenses, up to a limit of about $44,000. All you need to get on the ballot in either country is a token number of signatures (ten in Britain and twenty-five in Canada) and a minimal "deposit," which is returned to all candidates who get a modest percentage of the vote. This discourages people who know nobody's going to vote for them, without making legitimate candidates go through the time and expense of signature procurement. Both Britain and Canada also require the networks to give a small amount of free time to all parties in proportion to their electoral strength. Even the three Scottish Nationalists (for which Sean Connery has served as spokesman) get some free time. Since the American networks get their broadcasting licenses free from the government, there's no reason the licenses couldn't be conditioned on a few hours of free prime time for the parties.

Americans are eager for more sensible choices in their democracy. Yet our system is geared toward two-party paralysis and fringe eccentrics such as David Duke and Pat Buchanan. No one's arguing a third party will solve all of our political problems. But why construct the system to make its emergence impossible? •

Bush and abortion counseling.

GAG ME WITH A RULE

By Walter Dellinger

"With seventeen months of his presidency remaining, Ronald Reagan will bank on executive orders and judicial action to implement social policies that he cannot persuade Congress to enact, Gary L. Bauer, the president's chief domestic policy adviser, declared . . ."
—*The Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 1987

Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of the abortion counseling saga is that this troublesome policy became national law over the strong opposition of substantial majorities in both houses of Congress. The story is one example of a governing structure in which a president who defers on social issues to an extreme wing of his political party

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and is supported by a complaisant Supreme Court can simply bypass the national legislature and adopt federal policies that override state law and impair important constitutional values. It's a story, in short, of conservative judicial activism and conservative big government. It makes a sobering tale.

In 1970 Congress adopted Title X of the Public Health Services Act, which subsidizes clinics providing low-cost family planning services to nearly 5 million low-income clients, often women who suffer disproportionately high rates of teenage pregnancy, infant mortality, and impaired health. Although it was undisputed that Title X funds could not be used to *perform* abortions, the act made no mention of restricting abortion counseling or referral, and its sponsors intended that Title X patients would be informed of, and referred to, appropriate medical services that could be obtained outside the program.

For nearly eighteen years after the enactment of Title X the consistent interpretation of the act by four administrations under Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter and seven-eighths of Reagan's two terms was that Title X physicians and counselors could provide pregnant patients with non-directive counseling about all available alternatives, including prenatal care, adoption, and abortion. A Ford administration official, for example, interpreted Title X to mean that a counselor had "not only a First Amendment right but a duty to inform a patient of all legal options." Congress consistently rejected efforts to amend Title X to prohibit counseling of pregnant women that included reference to abortion.

Then, in the waning days of the Reagan administration, presidential assistant Gary Bauer hatched his plan to reverse administratively the settled meaning of the 1970 act. Bauer was the prime mover in promulgating a drastic new interpretation of Title X. Non-directive counseling was replaced by an administrative interpretation of the act that required physicians and counselors to withhold information about abortion even from patients who were at medical risk from continuation of a pregnancy. (The only exception is for immediate medical emergencies.)

The idea of federal agents dictating doctor-patient conversations immediately raised First Amendment worries. Under the regulations, when "a pregnant woman requests information about abortion," the physician is instructed that a proper response would be that "this project does not consider abortion an appropriate method of family planning and therefore does not counsel or refer for abortion." The regulations also impaired a patient's liberty interest in making her own informed decision among medical alternatives. Regardless of her individual circumstances, a pregnant patient "must be referred" to "providers that promote the welfare of mother and unborn child."

When the challenged regulations came before the Supreme Court in *Rust* v. *Sullivan*, most expected the Court simply to hold that since Congress never authorized restrictions on counseling and referral, the new regulations were a faulty administrative interpretation of congressional intent. The Bush administration argued, however, that the Court's provocative 1984 decision in *Chevron* v. *National Resources Defense Council* should be read to require courts to accept as the "true" interpretation of a statute the meaning adopted by the agency charged with its administration. Under *Chevron* it is often the role of bureaucrats, rather than judges, to "say what the law is."

Chevron makes a good deal of sense in many contexts. In *Chevron* itself, for example, the Supreme Court understandably deferred to the expert interpretation of the Environmental Protection Agency concerning the meaning of the word "source" (of pollution) in the Clean Air Act. But the challenge to the Title X "gag rule" presented a bizarre twist on this approach. First of all, the "gag rule" was not a consistent and long-standing agency interpretation of a statute: it actually *reversed* a long-standing interpretation. More fundamentally, the Court went out of its way to accept an agency interpretation that raises serious constitutional questions, while avoiding a more obvious construction of the statute.

Before a law is construed in a way that raises serious constitutional difficulties, there ought to be at least a clear statement that Congress actually intended the constitutionally questionable outcome. This notion that statutes should be interpreted to avoid constitutional questions is no mere technical rule. It's a way, as Chicago professor Cass Sunstein has argued, to ensure "that Congress, rather than bureaucrats, will deliberate on questions ... that intrude into constitutionally sensitive areas."

In *Rust*, however, a narrow majority of the Supreme Court flatly disregarded this principle. Although the Court acknowledged that the "language of the statute is ambiguous," and that "at no time did Congress directly address the issues of abortion counseling [or] referral," the Court insisted on accepting the agency's interpretation of the statute even though it raised serious constitutional problems. Chief Justice Rehnquist (joined by Justices White, Scalia, Kennedy, and Souter) held that since the Department of Health and Human Services' new interpretation was based upon a "reasoned analysis" supported in part by "a shift in attitude against the 'elimination of unborn children,'" the Court was obliged to "defer to the Secretary's permissible construction of the statute."

The Court's majority did not even respond to the fact that the administrator's interpretation would clash with many states' existing laws. When the proposed new rules were put forth for public comment, alarmed medical groups argued that under the law of almost every state, a physician who failed to provide complete information about medical alternatives could be sued for malpractice. The secretary blithely responded in the *Federal Register* that "to the extent that these regulations are inconsistent with the provisions of State law regarding counseling and informed consent, they may, in some circumstances, supersede State law under the

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Supremacy Clause of the Constitution." Although the Constitution makes it clear that "the Laws of the United States" are supreme over the laws of the states, due regard for federalism suggests that the decision to displace long-standing and important state law ought to be traceable to Congress, and not merely to an executive branch employee interpreting an ambiguous congressional statute.

Justice O'Connor, dissenting in *Rust*, noted that "in this case we need only tell the Secretary that his regulations are not a reasonable interpretation of the statute." In the aftermath of the *Rust* decision, Congress emphatically told the secretary just that. By votes of 73-25 in the Senate and 272-156 in the House, members flatly repudiated the agency's misinterpretation to which the Court had deferred. Bauer's regulation nonetheless became national law. On November 19 President Bush vetoed the legislation by which Congress corrected the misreading of its statute, and the House narrowly failed to achieve the two-thirds necessary to override the president. A federal official who wants to issue a national edict of dubious constitutionality now needs only find a statutory peg for the rule, wait for a compliant Court to accept his "reinterpretation," and then rely upon a presidential veto to freeze the administrative line into law.

It bears remembering that this rule, the brainchild of a presidential minion, may be rescinded at any time by President Bush. Its continued existence shows how an administration allegedly opposed to judicial activism and to the federal government trampling on state laws is happy to abandon both principles to appease and console its increasingly restless right flank.

WALTER DELLINGER is professor of law at Duke University.

THE PRESS

DIRT TRAIL

By Bob Cohn

"Meet me in the park across from the Capitol," Bill whispered into the phone. He arrived armed with dozens of documents, but we had to move three times before he would open one of the manila envelopes. The stuff was sensational. It indicated that Anita Hill was a liberal ideologue who had made sexually provocative comments to her male students, contradicting dozens of sources who had characterized Hill as a prim Oklahoma Republican. But given Bill's ties to the GOP, could it be true?

When I got back to my desk there was a phone message from a friend of Hill's. I called him. Had I heard about the apartment Clarence Thomas lived in back in the early 1980s? His living room walls were covered with *Playboy* pin-ups. Miss October was over his desk. C'mon, I said. Thomas was living with his preteen son at the time. But he was emphatic; he knew somebody who had been inside the apartment. I made a few calls to others who had also been to Thomas's home at that time. No luck. Even my Democratic friends on Capitol Hill who for months had been trashing Thomas hadn't heard this one.

After Clarence Thomas was confirmed to the Supreme Court I spent a month trying to find out what really happened between him and Anita Hill a decade ago. I interviewed more than 100 people. I filed Freedom of Information Act requests. And I met nervous sources in the park. I had no illusions it would be easy, but I had underestimated people's willingness to spin, manipulate, and lie.

Of two dozen people I interviewed who had worked with Thomas and Hill at the Department of Education or the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, all but one said they never saw Thomas behave inappropriately toward Hill, nor did they believe he had done so. I was surprised by the near-unanimity of the former colleagues' responses. Polls showed that Americans believed Thomas over Hill 2-to-1, but their co-workers seemed to favor him 20-to-1.

The lone dissenter was a guy who confided he had once overheard Thomas ask Hill whether she was going to a particular nightclub that he intended to visit. It wasn't necessarily a damning recollection, but it suggested there was a relationship between them that wasn't, as Thomas had insisted, strictly professional. Then it turned out he had been bad-mouthing his former boss for years. I had to discount his story after one woman, a liberal Democrat who disagreed with Thomas ideologically at DOE, warned, "I'd be wary of anything he tells you."

A few other co-workers had vivid memories. One recalled Hill aggressively jockeying for position among other staffers waiting outside Thomas's EEOC office so she could get a seat near the boss. Interesting, but maybe Hill was just another Washington bootlicker. A former DOE colleague remembered being on an elevator with Thomas and Hill. Just the three of them! Were they bickering? Holding hands? Exchanging furtive glances? I asked whether anything unusual had occurred. Nope.

Finally I found a woman who believed there was a simple misunderstanding between Thomas and Hill. "I know them both very well," she said. "They're both top-notch. My guess is something was said by Judge Thomas that was fairly innocuous, but was interpreted differently by Anita Hill."

The conservative activists were less charitable to Hill. Their tips were fantastic, though they rarely led to any solid proof. One source suggested I talk to a group of Hill's former law students at Oral Roberts University. I tracked down Lawrence Shiles, who had signed a com-

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mittee affidavit describing events that occurred while he was enrolled in Hill's legal writing class in 1983. In the three-page affidavit and a subsequent interview, Shiles said—get this—that he and two male friends found a dozen short black pubic hairs inside papers returned by Hill. (The affidavit was signed two days after Hill related her now-infamous Coke can incident, but Shiles said he and friends had been joking about the incident for years.) One of the other friends confirmed the story but said he couldn't swear they were pubic hairs. A fourth claimed Hill had made sexually provocative comments to him—he said he later "fantasized about the world's kinkiest law professor"—but he wouldn't sign a committee affidavit or allow me to use his name because he said he feared his law practice might suffer. The former students seemed to share an aversion to Hill. All complained that she was an incompetent professor whose liberal views infected her teaching. Several said off the record that she represented, as one put it, "the worst case of affirmative action."

Other GOP sources in Washington said Hill was linked with a Democratic women's group in Oklahoma whose members had helped her prepare her Senate testimony. (Not true, as far as I could tell.) They suggested she was a lesbian, and even provided the name of her alleged current lover, a fellow professor at the University of Oklahoma. (No students or faculty members I talked to thought it was true, and I was unable to reach the professor.) They spelled out their Grand Theory on Hill: she was an incompetent lawyer whose ambitions exceeded her skills. When Thomas didn't give her the job she wanted at EEOC, she became bitter and then vindictive. The beauty of this theory, as they saw it, is that it accounts for the four contemporaneous witnesses. It also was unprovable, and thus impossible to dismiss.

The liberals too had cranked up their spin machine. First, leaders of liberal interest groups said they'd known of harassment allegations since the mid-'80s but had no concrete evidence. Then they tried to keep alive the stories of Thomas's interest in pornography. A friend from law school already had admitted that Thomas liked to go to porn movies in the early 1970s and regale fellow students with the details the next morning. The day before the hearings began, NBC quoted an anonymous Thomas friend saying that the nominee "has not seen or been addicted to porn movies for several years," a statement that raised more questions than it settled. Even before the hearings ended there were rumors that several news organizations, including *The Washington Post*, had lists of porn videos that Thomas had rented in the '80s, thus feeding the perception of a man obsessed with smut.

My frustration mounted when I tried to nail down the relationship between Hill and liberal interest groups in Washington. I knew that the day before she testified, Hill had huddled with her lawyers at Pepper, Hamilton & Scheetz, a D.C. law firm where friends of hers worked. She surrounded herself with some of the country's most high-powered liberal attorneys, including Charles Ogletree from Harvard and John Frank from Phoenix. She consulted with Catharine MacKinnon, a University of Michigan law professor and staunch feminist theorist. She also relied on a Washington p.r. team that included Wendy Sherman, a former aide to Democratic Senator Barbara Mikulski, Louise Hilsen, a former press secretary to Democratic Representative Dennis Eckart, and Nicki Heidepriem, a veteran anti-Bork activist.

No one could begrudge Hill a competent legal or p.r. team. But sources inside Pepper, Hamilton told me that Molly Yard of the National Organization for Women and Eleanor Smeal of the Fund for a Feminist Majority led a delegation of women to the law firm that day. They met with Hill and, I was told, helped prepare her testimony. Maybe this could explain why Hill's statement to the committee on October 11 was so much more vivid than her faxed statement on September 23 or her responses to FBI questions on September 25, neither of which made any reference to Long Dong Silver or pubic hair. But Yard and Smeal denied they were there and had good alibis. Yard was in New York undergoing medical therapy; Smeal in California. Then another Pepper, Hamilton source told me it was Judith Lichtman from the Women's Legal Defense Fund who had visited Hill. Lichtman swore she wasn't there, though she did speak to Hill's lawyers on the phone.

Meanwhile I'd chased a tip that National Abortion Rights Action League executive director Kate Michelman had boasted of NARAL's involvement with Hill a few days before Hill's name was mentioned in the press. I traced the story to its source, a NARAL fund-raiser. She said that in early October Michelman was discussing an upcoming campaign and told the fund-raiser, "This will not be a difficult job. We have Anita Hill. She's agreed to come forward. We've been working with her since July." The story suggested that NARAL—and probably other interest groups as well—knew of Hill's allegations as early as July and had been pressuring her to go public. If true, it confirmed the widespread belief that Hill was in cahoots with the liberal groups. But Michelman does not recall the conversation with the fund-raiser, and she insists that though she knew generally of sexual harassment charges, she did not know Hill's name until it was reported in the press.

One thing I had confirmed was that top Republicans were trying to line up people who could trash Hill. White House counsel C. Boyden Gray was busy seeking "dirt" on Hill from Washington lawyers who had worked with her in the early '80s, according to one attorney. After GOP staffers were unable to persuade some of the former Oral Roberts students to sign affidavits, Senator Alan Simpson called one during Hearings Weekend and implored him to help Thomas. When he refused, Assistant Attorney General Lee Rawls phoned the man's father, a prominent Wyoming Republican, to appeal his son's decision. The Republicans wanted the option of using the former student's information if the vote on Thomas got close. Spokesmen for Simpson and Rawls confirm that the

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calls were made. The former student never came forward, but he did tell me he believed Hill was "absolutely as nutty as they come."

Trouble was, by the end of my travails, I was too. The more I reported, it seemed, the less I knew. I began to trust no one; believe nothing. "Motives be damned," wrote Dr. Morris E. Chaftez in a December letter to *The Wall Street Journal*. "Let's find out who's the perjurer." After weeks of investigation, I had no clearer idea than the Judiciary Committee.

BOB COHN covers the Supreme Court for *Newsweek*.

The chaotic post-Soviet union.

C.I.S.O.S.

By John Lloyd

MOSCOW

This is the country of the broken word: nothing is worth the paper it is written on, especially now that paper prices are going up so fast. Boris Yeltsin, president of Russia, agreed with Mikhail Gorbachev, president of the Soviet Union, and seven other Soviet republican presidents last month to sign a union treaty. Yeltsin and the others have reneged on that agreement. Instead, some ten days ago Yeltsin signed an agreement with Leonid Kravchuk and Stanislav Shushkevich, presidents of Ukraine and Byelorussia, setting up a Commonwealth of Independent States. Yeltsin did not mention this to Nursultan Nazarbayev, president of Kazakhstan, the fourth republic with strategic nuclear weapons (with whom the three Slav nations had signed a pact the year before) until after the Commonwealth had issued its founding document. Among other things, that document laid down how strategic nuclear weapons were to be controlled. Nazarbayev told the press he was going to stick with Gorbachev and the Union treaty, but a few days later he agreed with the four other Central Asian republics to apply for membership in the Commonwealth. He said at the press conference that Gorbachev should "stop moaning."

Kravchuk took the agreement back to Minsk, changed it fundamentally from the version he had agreed upon with his two fellow Slav presidents, and put it through his parliament. He then declared he was commander in chief of all Soviet military forces on his territory—having agreed only days before that the Soviet military command would be unified and indivisible. He later said that a Ukrainian currency would soon be introduced—by next summer—having earlier agreed with Russia and Byelorussia that Ukraine would stay with the ruble for at least a year. Byelorussia, which also made the same agreement, later announced it was substituting special coupons for the ruble for 60 percent of all salaries "in order to protect its market."

The seats of government are like the courts of Renaissance princes: no one is to be trusted. Alexander Rutskoi, Yeltsin's vice president, is now in open opposition to him—on economic reform, on keeping the Russian republics in line, and on relations with the army. So straightforward has this opposition been that many Russian observers here believe that the hidden agenda is that Rutskoi remains a Yeltsin ally and is mapping out an alternative path for the Russian president to take when he has to betray his ministers, who are now preparing the economic reform to which he has committed himself. The common currency among these ministers—many of them sparky, sardonic former academics—is that they will last only a few months in office, and will then be lucky if they are able to return to academic life in liberty. As I write this, Gavril Popov, Moscow's mayor, has announced his resignation, claiming he cannot get his policies enacted. Anatoly Sobchak, meeting U.S. and other politicians led by former Vice President Walter Mondale, talks of his intention to resign as mayor of St. Petersburg within a few months. No one gives Yeltsin more than six months. If government ministers and mayors do not believe in their own government's future, then the case for trust in anything is limited.

This extends to commerce, and to morality too. The new business class, making rubles in vast quantities thanks to desperation in a shortage economy and to the wide cracks left by a dispirited, corrupt, and ignorant police force, puts as many of them abroad as they can. And no wonder: the state foreign currency bank has been declared bankrupt and has been looting Soviet company and private hard currency accounts to pay state debts with the abandon of an institution for which the concept of private property still has little effective meaning. Everyone shifts the blame to someone else—usually the Communist Party and Gorbachev, who sits in the Kremlin like a tubby Saint Sebastian. Kravchuk left the Communist Party less than six months ago and was ideology secretary for Ukraine: that is, he kept people in line when they appeared to sway toward nationalism.

Nothing anyone says can be treated as anything more than a provisional position—except those statements that ask for more aid from abroad. Aid is now filling an increasing number of Soviet pockets: a British consultant working on bread supply for Moscow told me that the grain silos were 70 percent filled with foreign grain, bought with credits. The food packages from the European Community, wrapped up in one-kilogram bags and delivered to the hands of the recipients by the German Red Cross and the French Médecins sans Frontières, are now forming an ever more necessary part of the diet of many citizens, especially the frightened pensioners and the desperate mothers with young families—and often without a partner.

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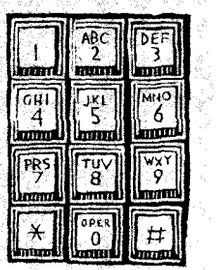

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the cities of the Urals, long geared to defense production, are now desperate: their once favored status has been reversed, for now their main product cannot be traded for anything to eat. A recent article about Perm, for long a closed city, claims that food deliveries have stopped completely. Another news item the same day told of an engineer in Tashkent who had left his professional job to become a full-time scavenger in dustbins: every day now in Moscow I see others like him at work on the lush pickings in the bins of the foreigners' blocks where I live and work.

It is in this atmosphere that the new Commonwealth will have to find a way to work. And although confusion and distrust are endemic, it is still not completely clear that it will fail. Certainly the force of nationalism, once ignored, should not now be overly emphasized. Indeed, earlier this year, Ukrainian nationalism hardly seemed to exist at all in the east of the state. In trips to the Donbass, the Soviet Union's biggest mining area, I never encountered any national feeling or even fear of nationalism from the miners I met there—most of whom appeared to be Russian. What I did find was a certain kind of class feeling, which asserted a tenuous solidarity with other Soviet miners—especially in the other big field, in southern Siberia. In the time of the big strikes early this year, Donbass miners appeared to act rather indifferently both to the representatives of Rukh and to those Russians (usually Communists) opposing nationalism by equating it with fascism. To add poignancy to this tradition, the Donbass's greatest contemporary dissident was a Russian, a free trade unionist who sought to realize the ideals of human brotherhood in the face of their betrayal by communism—Alexei Nikitin, hounded to death in the early '80s by "psychiatric treatment."

The much-maligned Solzhenitsyn captured this tradition best. For him, talk of nationalism that would divide the Slav peoples—Russian, Ukrainian, and Byelorussian—was a "recently invented falsehood." In his pamphlet published a year ago—"How are we to rebuild Russia?"—he argued that the Slav peoples, more than 70 percent of the Soviet Union, have been bound together by history, and by more recent "bloody suffering." He appeals—"Brothers: We do not need this cruel division! This is the insanity of the Communist years. We have suffered together through the Soviet times, together we have ended up in this pit and together we will climb out of it." This is not Soviet, but Slavic man: this is the gut reaction of the chronicler of a people who still can scarcely imagine there would be real divisions between them—like Frenchmen refusing to recognize the separate nationality of a French-speaking Belgian or Swiss. Whether he is proved right or not will depend on whether the common memory of oppression is a greater bond than the centrifugal forces of chaotic rebirth. Somehow, in this commonwealth of broken promises, I doubt it.

JOHN LLOYD is Moscow correspondent of the *Financial Times*.

Fighters vs. bombers.

STEALTH-CREATORS

By Gregg Easterbrook

Last June, in the afterglow of the Gulf war, the Pentagon staged a stealth show at Andrews Air Force Base. On hand to impress various dignitaries were some of the wildest looking flying machines ever, including the B-2 bomber and the F-117 attack aircraft of Iraq air campaign renown. Also parked on the tarmac was an obscure stealth plane: a prototype of the new F-22 stealth fighter, intended to be the world's hottest interceptor of the twenty-first century.

There was considerable oohing and aahing over the famous planes, but few looked twice at the F-22—strangely, because if the F-22 is built in the numbers the Air Force desires, it will entail more money than ever contemplated for the B-2. Strangely also because the F-22 is a stunning breakthrough of stealth science, one that has gone completely unnoticed: it's shaped like a conventional airplane, not like a Batmobile or an airborne garden trowel. This is why the F-22 was upstaged by its exotic cousins. It's also why the B-2—as expensive as it is bizarre-looking—is already out of date.

There is another important difference between the stealth planes, which has likewise escaped public notice. The B-2 took eight years and $33 billion in public funds from concept to first flight. The F-22 required just four years and $4 billion, though fighters are in many ways more complex aircraft than bombers, being much faster and more maneuverable. The B-2 was developed on an essentially non-competitive basis, with a single prime contractor granted a cost-plus monopoly before the first rivet was forged. Development of the F-22, by contrast, involved an unusual free market competition in which teams of contractors flew prototypes built with their own funds and ideas. The F-22 approach might hold down the price of other weapons programs. Aerospace contractors are hoping that the F-22 continues to draw no public notice, so that they will not be pressured to pursue more market-oriented programs.

A decade ago, when plans for the B-2 bomber were being drawn, planners thought radar could be frustrated in one of two fundamental ways: with exceptionally smooth curvilinear surfaces that (basically) cause the echoes to diffuse, or angled plates that (basically) bounce waves away from the sending antenna. Neither is conducive to normal aircraft design.

The first specific attempt at a stealth aircraft—the F-117 program of the late 1970s—employed the angled plate solution. Designers fashioned a flying machine from an

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awkward collection of "faceted" hunks. Concealment was as melodramatic as anything since the Manhattan Project: prototypes were moved inside larger planes and flown only at night, over remote parts of Nevada. The aim was to prevent onlookers from even glimpsing the F-117's odd shape, since shape was thought to be the central secret of stealth.

The F-117 project showed that a modern jet with radar evasion properties could take flight. But it was soon obvious to researchers that the weird shape meant awful aerodynamics. Two F-117 prototypes crashed, partly owing to handling problems; the first model off the assembly line crashed. Poor handling ensured that the F-117 would stand no chance in a dogfight against conventional high-performance jets. Flight dynamics of the F-117 were adequate for missions such as the Panama invasion and the air war against Iraq, where the chance of encountering enemy interceptors was slight, but little more.

The smoother-than-smooth approach next attracted the attention of stealth advocates. For decades a faction within the Air Force had pushed for a flying-wing bomber, and in the late 1940s Northrop put to flight two flying wings, the YB35 and YB49. Both were amazing to look at, revolutionary, but plagued by poor handling (the YB49 crashed twice). The project was canceled, but engineers retained a nostalgic affection for the idea. Old-timers recalled that when the YB49 flew, it stunned air traffic controllers by seeming to drift on and off their radar screens. When the notion of a stealth strategic bomber was proposed during the late Carter years, planners rapidly focused on a flying-wing approach, its handling drawbacks to be solved by new computer flight controls.

The flying wing had some theoretical fuel efficiency advantages over a standard design, but its real attraction to the Air Force was technological glamor. Since the advent of the ICBM, believers in the nuclear manned bomber have had increasing difficulty justifying their system. To bestow on bombers a technological gloss whose reflection might blind Congress, SAC generals have repeatedly tried to build planes with advanced features, particularly supersonic speed. By the time the B-2 was being planned, Mach speed was no longer taken seriously as a practical component of bomber design. So how to make the new bomber a spectacular machine? Build the first operational flying wing. The fact that flying wings, even if successful, would still have restricted aerodynamics compared with conventional designs and would surely be more expensive hardly deterred the generals.

And as luck would have it, the main B-2 contract award came up in 1981, just as the Reagan administration embarked on its defense spending binge. Clay models shown to senior White House officials depicted an airplane awesome to behold, practically a flying saucer! Thus a decision was made at the outset of the stealth bomber program not to find a stealth technique, but specifically to commit to a flying-wing design. The distinction is critical, for it meant that engineers would not be given free reign to devise innovative ideas.

As a result, each B-2 bomber would end up costing at least $865 million—a price that would have kept even Caspar Weinberger awake at night. The cost stems both from the flying-wing approach, which assumed extensive use of expensive composite materials, and the manner in which the program was structured. Planners decided that achieving stealth via smoother-than-smooth shape (some B-2 joints have tolerances of 1/10,000th of an inch) would require building every bomber on "hard" production tooling. This meant finalizing the design at the beginning, not the end, of the program: skipping the prototype stage in which bugs are ironed out. No prototype, in turn, meant no meaningful competition for the contract.

The third major stealth project of the 1980s, the Navy A-12 stealth attack plane, followed the same tack. There was no prototype competition, just a sole-source contract based on sales pitches and simulations. The A-12 was canceled last year by Defense Secretary Richard Cheney, who was enraged to learn the Navy had lied to him about the program's many overruns and technical failings. The A-12 design was a sort of jet-propelled pizza slice, another variation on the flying wing.

In 1986, when the F-22 was being conceived, new institutional forces were acting on the Pentagon. The Reagan buildup had led to procurement scandals and a scathing report, written by a White House commission chaired by David Packard, on the way weapons were purchased. Packard blasted both sole-source and no-prototype arrangements. Defense officials decided to make the new fighter contract the Packard Commission test case, approving a wide-open contest in which not only would dueling prototypes be privately designed, competitors would be free to propose whatever technical solutions they pleased. Contractors were also required to gamble some of their own funds, on the assumption that this would replace the traditional run-up-the-bill mind-set with an incentive to find cost-effective solutions.

Almost immediately F-22 designers tossed out the stealth approach used by the B-2. Knowing they would have to fly prototypes to win the final contract—prototypes fashioned mainly by hand—engineers abandoned the notion of making the factory first. "You don't need production tooling to build a stealth aircraft," Richard Abrams, an F-22 manager for Lockheed, says. They abandoned the idea of 1/10,000th of an inch smoothness. They abandoned the flying wing, which cannot perform the sharp evasive maneuvers fighters need.

Freed of these notions, F-22 engineers discovered how to build stealthy aircraft in conventional shapes. One simple expedient was to arrange the wing and tail-flap edges in parallel lines; this complicates radar readings. Another was to employ fancy plastics only where truly necessary. Designers found that careful positioning of these composites did away with the need for covering the surface of the airplane with radar-absorbing materials, one of the costliest and most cantankerous B-2 manufacturing stages. Using new computers that can model radar echoes very accurately, engineers made further small design changes that create stealth within the con-

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fines of standard aerodynamics. They even managed to equip the new fighter with a "bubble" cockpit, which allows pilots a commanding view of the sky around them. The F-117 and B-2 cockpits are cages with limited visibility, because it was thought to be impossible to design a bubble canopy that is not a radar giveaway.

Perhaps the most important insight of the F-22 program was not to go off the deep end in pursuit of hypothetical stealth: to accept that no large object floating in the sky can ever be "invisible." The Air Force has already admitted that some current Soviet radars can track the B-2, though at shorter distances than they could find other planes. This is no flaw of B-2 design, merely an indication that technology is not magic. F-22 designers chose to sacrifice some hypothetical stealth performance for speed, agility, and reliability. The result is an aircraft with a radar "cross section" estimated at 1,000 times smaller than that of the current F-15 fighter. Not the cross section of a hummingbird—sometimes said to be the B-2 goal—but good enough.

Testing of the F-22 prototypes, conducted in the fall of 1990, drew virtually no public notice, because everything went well: both designs exceeded expectations. But that in itself should have been a story—a stealth program running well at relatively low cost. In just four months the F-22 prototypes logged 124 test flights. It took the B-2 two years to reach half that number.

As it happened, the same two contractors, Northrop and Lockheed, squared off in both the snappy F-22 competition and the lumbering B-2 effort. Both were the principal bidders on both projects; Northrop won the B-2, Lockheed the F-22. Through the second half of the 1980s, Northrop was simultaneously succumbing to cost escalation and delays in its stealth bomber effort and developing a stealth fighter that was a smashing technical success and cost far less money. Did the company have a split personality? A more likely explanation is that the F-22 effort was a non-bureaucratic, market-oriented program, while the B-2 began with an expensive preconceived notion and relentlessly stuck with it.

You haven't heard about the F-22's success because with the B-2 funding nearly closed out—fifteen of a requested seventy-five stealth bombers are under construction, with a recent Senate vote making further bombers unlikely—the last thing the Pentagon wants is to call attention to the fact that technology has already passed the B-2 by.

Backers of the B-2 still stand by the flying-wing concept. First, they say that because bombers are much larger than fighters and thus inherently harder to disguise from radar, the B-2 needs every technological edge. But the unusual configuration that lends the B-2 some minor stealth advantages over the F-22 comes at such a high cost that even the world's richest nation cannot afford more than a handful of the bombers. This is an instance of the best being the enemy of the good. Because the B-2 grew so expensive in pursuit of ultimate stealth, the Air Force will end up still reliant on the B-52, which has no stealth whatsoever.

Next, B-2 backers maintain that their plane needs max tech because bombers have different missions than fighters. Bombers must penetrate close to ground targets ringed by guns and missiles; fighters can zoom around high in the sky, beyond the range of "point defenses." An interesting theoretical argument, but actual use of U.S. air power suggests the opposite. The United States hasn't sent a heavy bomber at low level against thickly defended targets in forty years. In Vietnam, Grenada, Libya, Panama, and the Gulf, when precision attacks were required, the work was done by small planes—fighters such as the F-15 or "attack aircraft" such as the F-117. The heavy bombers were high in the sky, beyond the range of ground guns.

Much has been made of the Air Force's claim that just two B-2s during Desert Storm could have staged raids that required dozens of smaller planes. There's some merit to this—a few stealth aircraft may turn out to be better than many older models. But if so, where was the B-1 during Desert Storm? This bomber, redesigned in the late 1970s for partial stealth, is harder to detect on radar than the B-52, or any conventional fighter used in the Gulf war. Having the same payload as the B-2, the B-1 might have staged those same Desert Storm missions to which B-2 backers point. Yet the B-1 sat home, while the fighters did the pinpoint bombing. This is because small aircraft are harder for point defenses to shoot down than huge bombers; because, unlike bombers, they can engage in sharp evasive maneuvers during attack runs; because no one wants to send a billion-dollar bomber after a million-dollar bridge. Already a "standoff" conventional warhead is being designed for the B-2 so it won't have to enter point defenses anyway.

Sadly, conventional bombing power may continue to be needed in the new world order: for instance, to attack facilities for the production of weapons of mass destruction. If the Air Force could only bring itself to build a moderately priced and moderately stealth bomber to replace the B-52, there would be sound arguments for funding same. Till such time, defense resources should be diverted to aircraft like the F-22, aircraft that can actually be used. (Of course, by the time it enters production around 1993 the F-22 may have price problems of its own.)

Finally, supporters of the B-2 say with frustration that when their plane was designed, no one could have known that a way to build conventionally shaped stealth aircraft would later be discovered. But now that this is known, the case for a superexpensive flying-wing bomber collapses. Next spring B-2 backers will argue in Congress that it is spendthrift to cease manufacturing the bomber after No. 15. Since B-2 development money is sunk and cannot be recovered, they will say, stopping the line will cause that investment to be wasted. But the investment will not be wasted, for information learned in the B-2 effort helped make possible the F-22, and other more reasonable stealth planes likely to follow. The lesson of the F-22 is that aircraft can be stealthy without being outlandish. That is good news for the next generation of pilots, if bad news for the B-2.

GREGG EASTERBROOK is a contributing editor of *Newsweek* and *The Atlantic.*

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THE Public Interest

EDITORIAL OFFICES: 1112 16th Street, N.W., Suite 530
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EDITORS: IRVING KRISTOL • NATHAN GLAZER

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Pat Buchanan, Nixonian rump, declares.

TOMORROW BELONGS TO ME

By Sidney Blumenthal

Patrick J. Buchanan has prided himself on a militance that often crosses the line into belligerence. It is this menace, the lurking potential for sudden action, even violence, that provides a thrilling undercurrent to his politics. In the basement of the Buchanan family home in Washington, the boy was made to drill with a punching bag by his demanding father, an accountant who saw the world as filled with demons who needed to have their faces smashed. The household gods were Francisco Franco and Joseph McCarthy, both Catholic authoritarians who believed that a traditional society could be maintained only through acts of repression: "*Viva el muerte!*" In these heroes the flame of Isabella burned bright, the inquisition still upheld as the central method of order.

Buchanan was raised to be a church militant, sent like his father to Gonzaga High School, where conservative Jesuits—"God's Marines"—prepared him for the crusade against liberal relativists and godless Commies. His aggression was blessed and directed by infallible doctrine. But the young absolutist experienced the advent of the Second Vatican Council as nothing less than the fall from grace. "Lord," he writes in his memoir, as if appealing heavenward, "what a mess they made of it." His Church, "militant and triumphant, lives only in the recesses of memory." It is a glorious Lost Cause, somehow blurred in those recesses with the other Lost Cause. Just as Buchanan worships at the shrine of "that old Catholic Church," he bows his head reverently at the thought of the Confederacy. His great-grandfather, in fact, wore the gray uniform of the South, and in his study Buchanan has mounted large icons of the saints: Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.

Buchanan's view of the world has been virtually unaltered since his earliest days as a polemicist, when he wrote editorials for the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* based on FBI leaks and lies about Martin Luther King. To Buchanan everyone must fall into one of three camps: the believers, the heretics, or the infidels. If his notion of conservatism was not being fulfilled, it was because it had been "surrendered from within," as he wrote about the Church. Those in the political opposition did not simply have differing opinions; they were intent on destroying "Christian America." If Buchanan's side lost, it was because of an underhanded conspiracy, within and without.

The fall of Richard Nixon, it followed, was a liberal coup d'état. Buchanan's certainty on this point made him the only effective witness called before the Senate committee investigating the affair. When the Iran-contra scandal was revealed, Buchanan naturally saw it as just another nefarious coup attempt, and Oliver North as a martyr to the faith. Buchanan, then the White House communications director, delivered a fiery speech to a small crowd in Lafayette Park: "You will not bring this president down!" The rush of adrenaline fed his own ambition. If the enemy would bring down Reagan, then Buchanan would run for president. The publicists and operatives of certain sections of the right gathered in his living room in McLean, Virginia, to encourage him. But, according to a reliable source, he had a terrifying nightmare in which he was assassinated, becoming the martyr himself. So just as suddenly as he had raised the prospect of a campaign, he dashed it. "Churchill won't come out from under the bed," remarked one of his supporters.

It is not, then, exactly a surprise that Buchanan has at last decided to make the race. Nor is it astonishing that he has cast George Bush in the role of the betrayer. For Bush, the right-wing challenge from Buchanan must be bitter. Running through the president's entire career is the thread of trying to accommodate an ungrateful right. In 1987, as Bush laid the groundwork for his presidential campaign, he did his best to ingratiate himself with the right by appearing at a memorial dinner in honor of William Loeb, the late publisher of the Manchester, New Hampshire, *Union-Leader*, who had despised him. Bush read from Loeb's scathing editorials: "Here's the quote," said Bush. "'Incompetent, liberal, masquerading as a conservative, a hypocrite ... part of the self-appointed elite, a spoon-fed rich kid who has been wet-nursed to success.'" At the time, Bush's self-deprecation helped win him some conservative support, though Angela Bay Buchanan, Pat's sister, nodded every time Bush read one of Loeb's insults. Indeed, Loeb's remarks more or less could be read as a summary of Buchanan's complaint against Bush today. The *Union-Leader*, of course, is an enthusiastic supporter of Buchanan's candidacy.

Buchanan holds many well-known incendiary opinions, but in his announcement speech, he expressed an opinion that he had never vented before: "Why am I running?" he asked. "Because we Republicans can no longer

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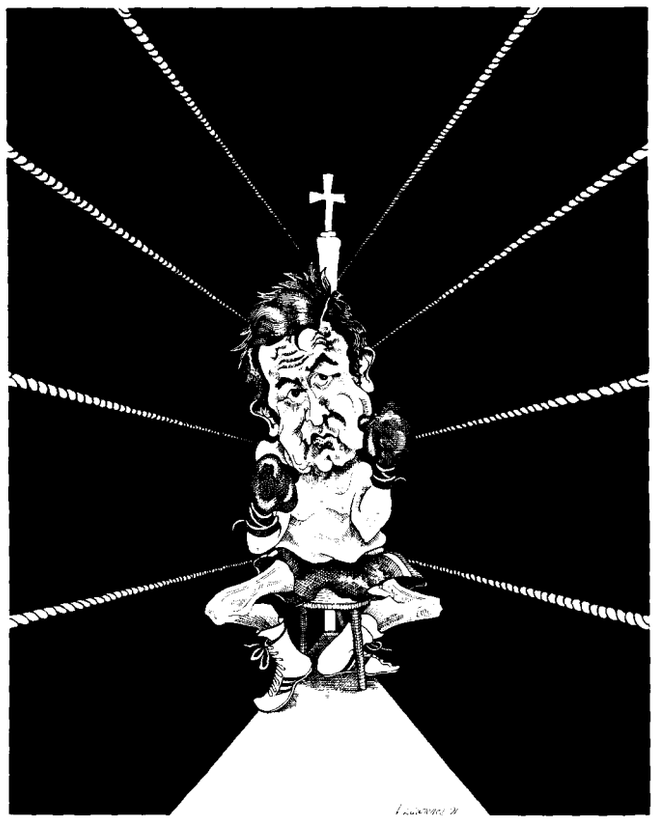
say it is all the liberals' fault." This extraordinary admission carries more levels of meaning than Buchanan may grasp. In his account, of course, it is the betrayer, George Bush, who is at fault. The troubles that have befallen the White House, according to Buchanan, can be traced to "its own breach of faith." Bush, he went on, "is yesterday and we are tomorrow"—tomorrow belongs to me. But Buchanan presents himself as the restorer of what Bush has betrayed, implying that tomorrow will resemble yesterday. Which yesterday will that be?

The journey through the Republican past in search of Buchanan's utopia passes many signposts of the coming struggle between himself and Bush; for the Bush-Buchanan contest is not merely about the Reagan legacy, but about deeper Republican battles. Under Nixon, Buchanan and Bush each occupied places within the president's office of propaganda. From the beginning of his career, Nixon's great skill was to balance the factions of the GOP. In this endeavor, Buchanan filled a narrow role. Nixon referred to him as "Mr. Inside" because he could craft phrases that would arouse the ardor of the right. His art was in composing alliterative sentences lashing liberals for Vice President Spiro Agnew, who had the role of chief henchman. In 1972 he became a trusted member of the Committee to Re-elect the President's inner "Attack Group." (One of Buchanan's minor acts was to help secure a White House job for a Jesuit priest cum Nixon defender, Father John McLaughlin. In the early Reagan years, McLaughlin, who had given up the collar, founded his own cult called The McLaughlin Group, in which he installed Buchanan at the lord's right hand.)



DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Bush performed a different role. When Watergate was exposed, Nixon named him as chairman of the Republican National Committee. Bush had been a favorite of the president's ever since he'd lost a Senate race Nixon had advised him to run. By putting in Bush as his man at the RNC, the class-conscious Nixon, who had retained the psychology of the envious, angry lower middle class, had his own Establishment patrician to serve as apologist. But neither Buchanan nor Bush could rescue Nixon. In 1992 they stand not only as representing different aspects of Reaganism, but of Nixonism as well. The legacy has been evenly distributed: Bush is the legatee of expedience, Buchanan of resentment.

The irony, of course, is that neither Bush nor Buchanan measures up to his first mentor. Like Nixon, Bush is absent principles, but unlike Nixon, he is missing the emotional connection to the inflamed Silent Majority. His infinite flexibility should not be mistaken for cunning. Buchanan shares Nixon's petit bourgeois background, but he never had to make his way through the underbrush of elective politics. As a result, Buchanan confuses the politics of resentment with the elixir of ideology.

But Buchanan's announcement has echoes that resonated even further back into Republican history. After World War II the party split into rancorous factions. In 1948 and 1952 Senator Robert Taft of Ohio and his conservative followers stormed the conventions. Taft fervently hoped that the end of the war would bring about the unraveling of the New Deal. With peace, the world before Roosevelt could be restored. He was horrified, therefore, by the onset of the cold war, which he saw as the spur to a vast "national security state." He opposed the Marshall Plan and the Western Alliance embodied in NATO. Yet twice his conservatism was rebuffed, defeated for the GOP nomination by the Eastern Establishment wing, represented by Thomas Dewey and then by Dewey's candidate, Dwight Eisenhower. (The Dewey wing was fervently supported by *Time* magazine and its owner, Henry Luce, who had coined the term "the American Century"—a globalist concept completely at odds with Taft's vision of an insular America.) After Taft was finally repulsed at the bitter 1952 convention, the Republican conservatives turned into cold warriors. But they opposed containment with the idea of rollback, a grand battle between good and evil that made anything less than a crusade look like a half measure. They remained unhappy with foreign aid and the United Nations. Beneath the veneer of their anti-communism lay an even older cause: America First.

Buchanan claims Bush "is a globalist and we are nationalists. He believes in some Pax Universalis; we believe in the old Republic. He would put America's wealth and power at the service of some vague New World Order; we will put America first." It was a very forced echo of an earlier time. In September 1940, while

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the "Battle of Britain" raged, the America First Committee announced its formation. It was opposed to all aid to the British and against any involvement in the war against the Axis powers. Its membership was drawn overwhelmingly from the Republican right, who were the losers at the 1940 convention a month before. (Wendell Willkie, the GOP candidate, was an interventionist who would go on to write the best-selling book *One World.*) The cause of isolationism was, for the America Firsters, an extension of the anti-New Deal cause. Almost all of them saw FDR as a monstrous cynic who had radically undermined traditional America in a quest for political power.

America Firsters were predominantly from small towns in the Midwest and West, some German ethnics and right-wing urban Catholics, mainly Irish (like the Buchanans), who tended to be fans of the demagogic radio priest Father Charles Coughlin. Coughlin had launched his "crusade of Americanism" through his Christian Front, with Franco as his inspirational figure. In 1936 Coughlin joined with a number of right-wing populists, including Gerald L. K. Smith (the David Duke of the 1930s) to form a third party, the Union Party, which failed miserably. America First eagerly welcomed Coughlin, who found in isolationism a new crusade. But the most famous figure associated with the America First Committee was the aviator and national hero Charles Lindbergh, who voiced its true sentiments in a speech before a mammoth rally on September 11, 1941: "The three most important groups who have been pressing this country toward war are the British, the Jewish, and the Roosevelt administration."

At the same time, certain influential Republicans joined committees in favor of interventionism and President Roosevelt's policy. Among them was Henry Stimson, who would soon become the secretary of war. Stimson spanned Roosevelts: as a young man he had worked in the administration of Theodore Roosevelt. In June 1940 he delivered a speech at Phillips Academy at Andover making the interventionist case. In the audience sat young George Bush.

In 1992 this archaic battle is replaying itself in the context of economic unease. For Buchanan, America First means not just the usual conservative issues, but a nationalistic, protectionist trade war with "a European superstate and a dynamic Asia led by Japan." To this combustible issue, Buchanan has added racial resentment, anti-Semitism, nativism, and xenophobia. Bush carries the weight not only of dreary economic times but also the difficult legacy of Republican interventionism. The battle between Bush and Buchanan will thus be laden with a divisive history.

The organs of the factions are already lining up. In the December 30 issue of *National Review*, William F. Buckley Jr., Buchanan's old hero, has written a lengthy, digressive essay whose conclusion in the matter of Buchanan's anti-Semitism is that he is guilty of the "impulse" that has been "most probably" prompted by "an iconoclastic temperament." Buckley here has attempted to act as the movement pontiff. But *National Review* seems to be returning to another sort of conservative past: the dyspeptic, superior attitude of the self-styled aristocrat Albert Jay Nock (an early influence on Buckley). The magazine dislikes Bush and has dissociated itself from Buchanan. It appears lost without Reagan, an artifact of an era that neither candidate will restore.

In the meantime, *Chronicles*, the standard-bearer of the Buchananite right, has published a special issue of its own: "America First 1941/1991." The editor, Thomas Fleming, in his lead article, establishes the case for Buchanan: "... we have to shoot the elephant in such a way that he falls on the donkey and crushes it. It might take a generation just to haul away the rotting carcasses, but we would be able, for the first time since 1932, to breathe clean air. How many of us, I wonder, are so used to the pollution that we have begun to like it? We shall never know, until we have created the first real opposition since 1941." *Chronicles*, which was on the periphery of conservatism under Reagan, has become suddenly engaged at its center as the Bush-Buchanan race looms. The magazine has no use for the GOP if it is to become a Deweyite party under Bush. Like the Taftites and the America Firsters, the editors of *Chronicles* hope that toppling the Democrats and the dominant Republicans will somehow lead to the enchanted kingdom of the past—before Pearl Harbor, before Roosevelt.

The coming struggle between Bush and Buchanan is the latest scene in a history of conflict for control over the Republican Party. On one side stand Eisenhower, Dewey, and Stimson; on the other the lineage runs to McCarthy, Taft, Lindbergh, and Coughlin. (One should recall that beyond that lies the epic battle between Theodore Roosevelt, Stimson's hero, and William Howard Taft, Robert's father.) But just as Bush and Buchanan fail to meet the inheritance of Nixon, so too they meander at the kneecaps of Taft and Dewey. Taft, at his worst moments, embraced a nasty early form of McCarthyism. But he had a genuine feel for the country, his party, and the Senate. Politics to him was not a matter of abstractions or immutable laws. There was a modesty and a concreteness to his conservatism that is utterly lacking in Buchanan's. Dewey was unabashed about who he was and what he stood for: a Wall Street lawyer, a member of the Establishment, and an internationalist. Of course, he was the real small-town boy (from Michigan), and Taft, his rival, was the wealthy scion of a president who attended Yale. But both were wholly authentic characters, unlike the Yale man who uneasily wears the Dewey mantle today.

It's no surprise that both Bush and Buchanan long to be Reagan, for the former Democrat managed to finesse much of the burden of Republican history. By force of his personality and Rooseveltian optimism, he managed to make the contradictions of American conservatism seem moot. But Reagan's conservatism resides only in the Reagan Library, his legacy an evanescent specter. Older, deeper forms of Republicanism now haunt the earth, and Pat Buchanan and George Bush are as much their victims as their heirs. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Cool Comforts

Admirers of Steven Soderbergh can relax—a little, anyway. The tension that follows an exceptional debut—his was *sex, lies and videotape*—is considerably calmed by **Kafka** (Miramax). It's excellently directed. More, it could hardly be less like his first film, yet Soderbergh is equally at ease with this different material and style. The silences are different here, but they are just as eloquent as in the first film.

Kafka, unsurprisingly, is set in Prague in 1919. Soderbergh approaches the milieu like a disciple of the expressionist German 1920s. The grandiose architecture within which small people scramble for interior size; sex administered by women as punishment in return for the punishment they have suffered from men seeking sex; the smell of Middle Europe that mixes the aromas of goulash and despair—Soderbergh understands them all. He identifies some of his masters: one character is named Murnau, and there's a reference to Orlac. (The first *Hands of Orlac* was filmed by Robert Wiene in 1924, a few years after he made *Caligari*.) But Soderbergh doesn't imitate. He uses what he has learned for his own ends, all the more impressively since the voluptuous shadows and spectral halls have so little to do with *sex, lies*.

He cast his first film perfectly with four (then) unknowns. This time, empowered by his success, he casts his film with knowns, and he directs them with comparable assurance. Jeremy Irons as Kafka, Theresa Russell as an employee in the same huge office, Alec Guinness as their chief, Armin Mueller-Stahl as a police inspector, Ian Holm as a mad scientist adroitly lay in the colors for which they were chosen, working with apparent confidence in the young director.

The trouble—and this sentence ought, unfortunately, to be set in permanent type for frequent use—is the script. Fiction about Kafka is not new: the second play about him in recent years has just opened in London. But Lem Dobbs's screenplay is murky, not mysterious, and after all its numinous hints and conspiracies, it ends in the tritest of sci-fi climaxes. Political terrorism involving some of Kafka's fellow employees and their friends eventually leads him to explore the castle commanding Prague (where the exteriors were shot). Loose ends and unexplained connections litter the script, but there's something even worse. Despite the best efforts of the director and his exceptional cast, nothing affects or moves us. We watch. We note the talents being displayed. Then it's over.

We're advised beforehand that we must not confuse this Kafka with the real Kafka: this one is an invention. Yet this one is a writer in his spare time, and there are references to "Metamorphosis," "In the Penal Colony," and more. It's hard not to think of the author; it's harder to think of the real Kafka engaged in all the athletic, James Bondian adventures of the last scenes.

The production design by Gavin Bocquet—the macabre use of the realistic—is the best of its kind since Jean Mandaroux's design for Orson Welles's film of *The Trial* (!). Cliff Martinez's score, which features the cimbalom, reminds us, deliberately, of *The Third Man*. Walt Lloyd, who shot Soderbergh's first film, did this one in the black-and-white of wood engravings. (The interior of the castle is done in color; the best that can be said of this device is that it's better than the other way around—world in color and the castle in black and white.) With Lloyd's help, Soderbergh makes the film seem to float, following currents of impulse and fear. But to little ultimate effect.

As a proof of Soderbergh's development as a director, however, *Kafka* is heartening news. Now if only he can find, or write, scripts that are worth his time.

Claude Chabrol is at the other end of *his* directing career and is still superb. His latest is yet another film version of *Madame Bovary*—the ninth—with a screenplay by himself. The moment it's announced that a film is to be made of a great novel, critical reservations spring into place like hounds at a huntsman's horn. On guard, we sniff for incompleteness, distortion (usually because of incompleteness), and all the other hazards that must attend the transmutation of a work meant to be read into one meant to be watched and heard. Generally, the best we can hope for is a film that approximates the spirit and intent of the original—never an equivalent (how could it be?) but a film that explains why its maker felt that a work created for one mode must be made available in another.

The really irritating point about Chabrol's film is that it could have done just that. From the almost sensual plea-

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Antonia and Jane. *Two young women in London, facing love, sex, life with wit and intelligence. Really bright. (Reviewed 12/2/91)* **La Belle Noiseuse.** *A wearied painter and his nude model in Jacques Rivette's adaptation of a Balzac story. Four hours and, as exploration of artistic process, worth it. (11/4/91)* **Bugsy.** *Based on fact. Warren Beatty as a 1940s gangster in love with a stormy woman (Annette Bening). The contrast between deep love and dark environment is well directed by Barry Levinson. (12/23&30/91)* **Meeting Venus.** *Istvan Szabós rendering of the madness of an opera house preparing a big production. It swirls with color and elegance and truth. Only the central story, an affair between conductor and diva, is dullish. (12/16/91)* **—SK**

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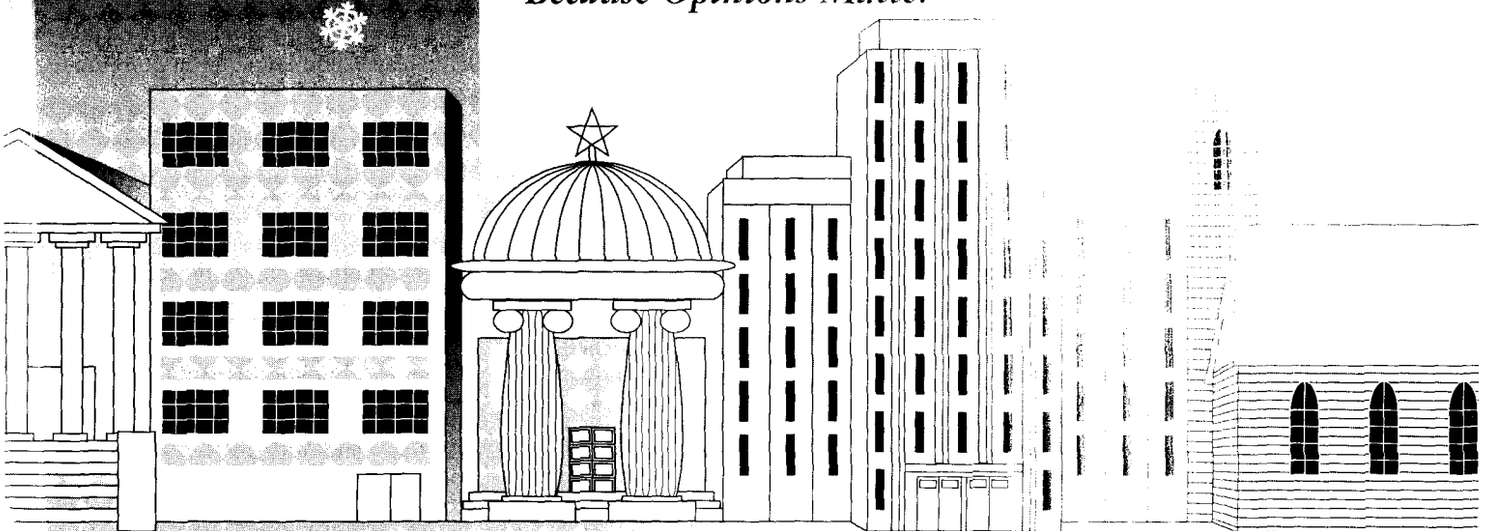

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sure of actually seeing the clothes (admirably designed by Corinne Jorry) to the spectacle of Bovary and Homais and Rodolphe fulfilling their Flaubertian destinies, Chabrol's film has many rewards. Flaubert himself said, "In my childhood and my youth I was wildly in love with the stage. I should perhaps have been a great actor if I had happened to be born poorer." He might well have appreciated the work of Jean-François Balmer, Jean Yanne, and Christophe Malavoy in the three roles above. The whole enterprise would have done pretty much what can be expected of a *Bovary* film if it were not for Chabrol's artistic infatuation with Isabelle Huppert.

He has already spoiled two films with her, *Violette* and *Story of Women*, and now he chooses this ice floe yet again—for the role that marks the arrival in world literature of a bourgeois woman with glands. Huppert's frigidity numbs the picture, and she makes it even worse when she tries to be impassioned. Here is a role that virtually begged for Isabelle Adjani (who wasted her passion on *Camille Claudel*). When Huppert joins Léon (Lucas Belvaux) for what may be the longest cab ride in history, I was sorry for the poor man and hoped he had a blanket with him to keep off the chill.

So in this case it's not the script that falters, it's a performance. Still, what a director Chabrol is. He helps Balmer to make Bovary a well-meaning, likable man so that Emma's betrayal of him seems all the more a force of nature rather than mere ennui or revulsion. (If there had *been* an Emma, that is.) Chabrol uses the voice-over—by François Perier—just sufficiently to keep the story fluent without lapsing into narration as a substitute for drama. His eye is unerring, beginning with the very first shot: a farm boy on a country road, waiting for the doctor's carriage, his small form outlined against the early dawn sky. Even with the impediment that Chabrol himself strapped on, his mastery is clear. •

Circus 1492: who the Admiral was, and who he wasn't.

They All Laughed at Christopher Columbus

By Simon Schama

I.

Excuse me for noticing, but haven't we been commemorating Columbus's quincentennial in the wrong year? I know that dates and math aren't America's strong suit right now, but it doesn't take advanced calculus to figure that 1492 plus 500 equals 1992.

What is it about Columbus that makes for botched commemoration? The Quatercentennial Columbian Exposition opened a year late, in 1893, delayed by the enormous scale of the show and by the protesting groups (yes, even then) who saw themselves more as victims than as beneficiaries of 1492. A century later, in a culture notorious for its brutally short attention span, the clock has been been advanced a year. The predictable events—the PBS series, the special issue of *Newsweek*, an enormous autumnal harvest of biographies, the museum exhibitions—have all come and nearly gone, making it virtually impossible to avoid a feeling of anticlimax when October 12, 1992, finally rolls around.

There is the possibility, of course, that fooling around with the date may represent some learned allusion to the replacement of the Julian calendar by the Gregorian calendar, but perhaps not. More likely, advancing the timetable of commemoration was the impulse of publishers, producers, and curators who worried that they would be overtaken by a jaded public and a short shelf life for Columbiana. Then again, with the multicultural wind blowing strong offshore, there is certainly some nervousness about focusing too precisely on a particular date, a particular person, a particular historical moment; a nagging anxiety that bothersome ghosts might be disturbed. Better to take refuge in cosily inclusive generalizations.

For anniversaries *can* be risky business. In 1688 the centenary of the defeat of the Spanish Armada helped to crystallize hostility to the Catholic Stuart King James II, and legitimized an appeal to Dutch William in the name of imperiled English liberties. A century later the centennial of that Glorious Revolution in 1788 seemed to Friends of Liberty on both sides of the English Channel to herald a new crisis for absolutism. And in 1989, Chinese students erected a Goddess of Liberty in Tiananmen Square modeled on both French and American iconographic types.

There may indeed be Some Unpleasantness in the offing. On the first day of 1992, for example, a lineal descendent of the Admiral of the Ocean Seas is to act as marshal at the Rose Bowl parade in Pasadena; but angry Native American activists have already ensured that there are likely to be thorns among the petals. So was it a sense of pre-emptive prudence that moved the National Gallery to call its megashow "Circa 1492" and to exhibit it circa 1991? In any case, the notion of simultaneously specifying a date and generalizing it is self-defeating, rather as if one made an appointment for approximately 3:21 p.m.

What we have at the National Gallery, in fact, is the Blockbuster That Lost Its Nerve: an exhibition that manages to be both astonishingly bold and depressingly pusillanimous, not least in its studied refusal to consider head-on the phenomenon of Columbus himself and the historical experience of his four voyages. Only one of the 569 objects in the exhibition relates directly to the Admiral. It is the woodcut-illustrated Basel edition of his famous letter written on the homeward journey and published just fifty-four days after his return, one of the most astonishing moments in the history of Renaissance publishing and heroic self-promotion. Not that one would know this from the dry caption on the wall; but then Columbus appears only twice in the wall captions (once as Columbus, Ohio).

He does a little better in the extraordinary catalog, which is a major contribution to the historical literature of the European encounter with other cultures, especially in the cartographic articles by David Woodward and Francis Maddison. But even in the book Columbus features more prominently as a

Simon Schama teaches history at Harvard University and is the author most recently of *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)* (Knopf).

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counterfactual case. Thus, dense articles on Asian art and culture, in keeping with the considerable space given to them in the show, present what Columbus *would* have seen had he actually made landfall in Japan, or in Korea, or in China, or in India.

Not only has the Admiral gone missing, so has 1492. For it is precisely the Iberian cultures that had their most traumatic moments in that year—the cultures of Moorish Granada and Hispanic Judaism—that are most scantily represented. There are a score or more objects (all of stunning quality) from Ottoman Turkey, Mamluk Egypt, and Iran, but only two items, including the so-called sword of Boabdil, the last ruler of the shrunken Moorish state, from Granada. Jewish Spain is also represented by just two objects, a Passover dish and the exquisitely illuminated Lisbon Bible from the British Library, inexplicably opened (in its reproduction in the catalog, too) to a sampling of the laws of leprosy.

Still, if there are glaring absences in "Circa 1492," there are also extraordinary presences. By globally contextualizing the Columbian moment, the show has succeeded in suggesting, through thoughtfully chosen and ravishingly beautiful examples, alternative cultural encounters to the one that actually took place on Guanahani on October 12. Chinese figures carrying Ming blue and white porcelain appear in an Iranian silk scroll. A spectacular Bini ivory saltcellar carved in West Africa for the export trade to Europe features figures of the fearsomely whiskery Portuguese. Christopher Weiditz's sympathetic drawings of the Aztecs, brought back to Spain by Hernán Cortés, depict the natives playing their wonderful version of *tlachtli*, or buttockball, in which the solid rubber ball could only be struck with the elbow or the rump.

Frederick Mote's fine essay on Ming China, moreover, draws attention to the ambitious western voyages of the imperial eunuch-admiral (a wonderful concept, unlikely to win favor at Annapolis) Zheng-he. The comparison with European exploration is indeed instructive. For although the Chinese preferred a massive display of authority (hundreds of junks, and 20,000 or more soldiers and sailors) to conversion by fire and sword, they were hardly models of multicultural pluralism. Their explorers assumed that barbarian cultures would be so awed by the omnipotence of the Middle Kingdom that they would gladly submit to a tributary relationship as the price of being admitted to its imperium.

Given this extraordinary cornucopia of gorgeous items brought together from four continents, it seems rather churlish to cavil at the revisionism of the exercise. But it is precisely the superabundance of the event, the feeling of massive cultural bloat with which one leaves the show, that is so troubling. However worthily uncolonial the goals of the exhibition may have been, it is hard to go into a gallery brimming with glittering golden objects without feeling a little like the Peruvian conquistadors, who demanded that chambers be filled to the ceiling with gold as the ransom for the doomed Inca Atahualpa. The insatiable omnivorousness of the exhibition puts one in mind of what Barthes, in a famous essay about another consumer-crazed culture, the seventeenth-century Dutch, called "the empire of things."

It is a peculiar irony that an exhibition so single-minded in its avoidance of the celebratory pieties of Western colonialism, a show so politically correct and diplomatically correct (and so multicultural in its corporate sponsors), should finally exemplify one of the values that it ostensibly deplores: the cultural power of metropolitan institutions. In this case, the acquisitive conqueror is not the Spanish crown, it is the National Gallery. For what we have here is nothing less than an imperial enterprise, authentically American in scale, so heroic and stupendous as to stun the beholder into critical submission—the last museological hurrah (one hopes) of the excessively gilded 1980s, the curatorial equivalent of a Malcolm Forbes party.

And the curatorial equivalent, too, of one of those multidecker Stage Deli sandwiches stuffed with brilliant and alluring ingredients that prove, after a while, to be punitively indigestible. For this megashow is not really a single exhibition at all, but multiple exhibitions, more or less under one roof. Hispano-Lusitanian art, Ottoman art, African art, Asian art, Meso-American art all enfilade into one another, with contemporaneity as their justifying connection. One of the most spectacular of the shows within the show presents a display of Renaissance paintings, drawings, and prints, ostensibly with the aim of demonstrating how scientific observation and the exploration of perspective were the necessary conditions of geographical exploration. And some of the items in these rooms, such as Leonardo's anatomical drawings, do indeed speak to the issue, though they have nothing to do with the visionary fabulism that lay at the heart of Columbus's own mission.

Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration
An exhibit at the National Gallery, Washington, D.C., October 12, 1991, to January 12, 1992
catalog edited by Jay Levenson
(Yale University Press, 671 pp., $59.95)

Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World
by Stephen Greenblatt
(University of Chicago Press, 202 pp., $24.95)

The "Libro de las Profecias" of Christopher Columbus
translation and commentary by Delno C. West and August Kling
(University of Florida Press, 274 pp., $49.95)

In Search of Columbus: The Sources for the First Voyage
by David Henige
(University of Arizona Press, 359 pp., $24.95)

America in 1492: The World of the Indian Peoples Before the Arrival of Columbus
edited by Alvin M. Josephy Jr.
(Knopf, 496 pp., $35)

The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy
by Kirkpatrick Sale
(Knopf, 384 pp., $24.95)

Columbus: The Great Adventure
by Paolo Taviani
translated by Luciano S. Farina and Mark A. Beckwith
(Orion, 272 pp., $20)

The Mysterious History of Columbus: An Exploration of the Man, the Myth, the Legacy
by John Noble Wilford
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1492: The Decline of Medievalism and the Rise of the Modern Age
by Barnett Litvinoff
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Columbus
by Felipe Fernández-Armesto
(Oxford University Press, 218 pp., $22.95)

Conquest of Eden: 1493-1515 Other Voyages of Columbus
by Michael Paiewonsky
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Sea of Lentils
by Antonio Benitez-Rojo
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1492: The Life and Times of Juan Cabezon of Castille
by Homero Aridjis
translated by Betty Ferber
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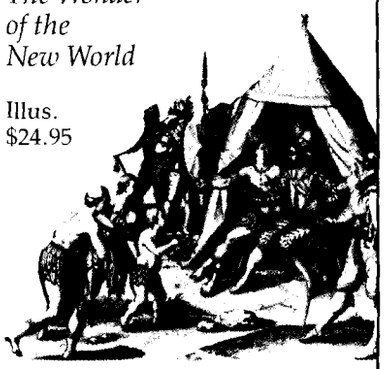

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Still, even if the connection is taken, what is Cranach's painting of the *Nymph of the Sacred Well* doing here? And more to the point, what does Leonardo's *Lady with an Ermine*—the image used as the public relations emblem for the entire enterprise—have to do with 1492, or with science, or with the history of the colonial encounter in America? If there is a compelling intellectual reason, other than the precise naturalistic rendering of a stoat, for this precious panel to have been freighted from Kraków to Washington, it is certainly lost on me. And even if the delicate and sympathetic drawing by Dürer of Katherina, a black Moorish servant to a Portuguese merchant, speaks to the problem of cross-cultural images, it is impossible to make the same case for his painted portrait of a Venetian Lady (especially since she might have been German).

In his introduction to the catalog, Jay Levenson, the curator of the exhibition, claims that "difficult choices had to be made in each of the major sections of the show, and if a particular culture is not represented then it is likely to be because it is less central to the theme of the exhibition rather than because of any shortcoming in its artistic creations." But the immense disparity between, say, the Hispanic-Judaic representation and the Italian Renaissance drawings hardly bears this out. In fact, the criteria for inclusion and exclusion seem to have simply collapsed into a curatorial appetite beside which the procurement policy of the Pentagon looks positively cheese-paring. The guiding rule seems to have been, if it's out there and it's circa fifteenth century and it's beautiful and it's available, then *go for it*. It is a principle of incorporation that would have been familiar to the *wunderkammer* collectors of the time.

In all this transshipment there is at least some unwitting connection with Columbus, for in his *Book of Prophecies*, an anthology of sacred texts and fragments compiled in 1501, these verses, I Kings 10:21-22, are prominently displayed:

> . . . there was no silver nor was any account made of it in the days of Solomon. For the King's navy, once in three years went with the navy of Hiram by sea to Tarshish and brought from thence gold and silver, elephants' teeth and apes and peacocks.

In the end, however, the whole becomes less than the sum of its parts. The glutted density of the show subverts one of its implicit purposes: to give as much careful attention to the masterpieces of non-European culture as one would to a Dürer or a Leonardo. Visitors from out of town, however, must strictly ration their time, and those steered by the gallery's tapes will experience approximately half an hour of West Africa, fifteen minutes of India (the culture most brutally compressed), half an hour of Korea, and so on, until they arrive, their aesthetic machinery in serious overload, at the American realms of gold, by which point it becomes virtually impossible to do justice to the complicated splendor of Tupinamba feather capes, and the remarkable textiles of the Inca (peculiarly and pedantically spelled "Inka"), and the strangely wonderful "vomiting spatulas" of the Tainos—the people whom Columbus actually encountered on Guanahani and Hispaniola.

The effect is not unlike those multicultural textbooks designed around the principle of Least Offense. The claims of each ethnic and cultural constituency are judiciously weighed in so many pages and graphically represented in so many visuals, sidebars, and charts. Exquisite care is taken not to commit any act of vulgar Eurocentricity, or to cast aspersions on non-European cultures by suggesting that, like the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions, they, too, may have had their share of cruelty, narrow-mindedness, and fanaticism. But to recast the pieties of a historiographical tradition dominated by sagas of Western saintliness and native savagery into its precise opposite is simply to replace one kind of reductionism with another.

Western culture has been culpable of demonizing and patronizing its victims as primitives; but redress through idealization commits only another form of condescension quite as egregious, by robbing such cultures of their human complexity, of a plausible complement of vices as well as virtues. Perhaps this is why I was relieved (if that is the word) to see the horrific obsidian sacrificial knives of the Aztecs given proper prominence in the exhibition. For what happened at Tenochtitlán, when Cortés's conquistadors burst into the Aztec empire, was that one cult of military fatalism and sacrificial ritual, in which blood was invested with the power of resurrection, was confronted with another. In 1487, for example, between 20,000 and 80,000 prisoners (the different sources, Nauhatl as well as Spanish, give different figures) were sacrificed at the dedication of the new Great Temple. According to the historian Friedrich Katz, they stood in four columns, stretching over two miles, before the Chief Speaker Ahuitzotl and his deputy collapsed in exhaustion from

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tearing out bleeding hearts, hour after hour.

It should have been possible to do justice in such an exhibition to all these terrible and fateful events without whitewashing either culture, and on a scale that would have given them more historical immediacy and vividness. A historically more rigorous design for a Mother of All Blockbusters would have sufficed with the exhibits of Portuguese, Spanish, Moorish, and Jewish artifacts; the instruments and the documents of navigation (which include some of the most extraordinary items, such as the sole copy of the Martin Waldseemuller map of 1507, and the great Catalan Atlas of 1375); and the stunning art and artifacts of indigenous America. What would have been lost in encyclopedic inclusiveness would have been gained in narrative coherence.

These problems of selection and scale, though, are only symptoms of a deeper failure to understand what it means to historicize. Columbus's conspicuous banishment from the exhibition exemplifies the kind of approach that is willing to sacrifice the consideration of historical agency to a kind of milquetoast universalism. The mere presentation of contemporaneity, after all, explains nothing. Instead, the whole invidious, conflict-ridden mess of history disappears within the embrace of synchronicity. In the weightless historical space called "Circa 1492," no particular persons or powers actually bring about events. Indeed, there are no events; there are only phenomena hazily defined, formed and reformed and deformed with the shifting winds and tides of the zeitgeist, now medieval, now renaissance, now scientific-empirical-capitalist.

Presumably this exercise in cultural latitudinarianism is meant to pre-empt the anger and the agitation that would inevitably be directed at the commemoration of a particular historical event and its author—as if to remember is to endorse. But commemorations, when they are seriously conceived and broadly addressed, are not the same as celebrations. The original meaning of *historia*, of course, is "inquiry." If inquiry is confined, however, only to reiterating the piety of forefathers, if remembering is indeed to be equated with endorsement, then Hitler and Stalin may repose undisturbed.

Such a conveniently emasculated version of historical understanding would be especially inappropriate for the encounter between Catholic Europe and the Americas. For whatever the atrocities inflicted by the conquistadors (and their fellow travelers, the European microbes), the impressive fact remains that the historians of the Spanish empire never suppressed them. Indeed, the immense chronicle of Bartolome de las Casas and his many successors recorded the horrors in the most unsparing detail. Conversely, it does no service to an understanding of native American cultures to cloak them in a mantle of innocence and virtue: to pretend, for example, that the hostile relationship between the Carib and the Arawak peoples was a European fantasy, or that cults of human sacrifice were strictly Aztec and didn't have a much older and widespread history throughout earlier Maya, Mixtec, and Diquis cultures.

Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City

JOSÉ MARÍA OBREGÓN, *THE INSPIRATION OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS* (1856)

This is an acute problem, obviously, for histories that are consciously designed as reparation. Thus, in his introduction to *America in 1492*, a collection of essays on indigenous American cultures, Alvin M. Josephy Jr. professes to discard both the myth of savagery and the myth of Eden (the latter myth completely overwhelms Kirkpatrick Sale's *The Conquest of Paradise*). Yet from the start he indignantly rejects reports of cannibalism among the Caribs (and, by extension, other American societies) as a typically abusive Eurocentric fantasy, fed by medieval marvel literature like the *Voyages* of Sir John Mandeville. In an essay on south American cultures in the same book, however, Louis C. Faron writes that "the Tupinamba and others like the Carib and Cubeo considered the eating of human flesh a ritual act, part of their belief in consubstantiation." In what may rank as the most startling throwaway line of quincentennial literature, Faron remarks that "a time for torturing and eating the captives was set but until then there was no harsh treatment of the prisoners." And he switches to a Julia Child-like breeziness in describing the practices of the Mundurucu: "Long before the men's return to the village the brains were removed and the teeth were taken out . . . , the head was then parboiled and dried . . . "

Of course one might produce, in a trice, countless instances from the European millennia of comparable horror. But the history of cultural encounters is not well served by grisliness contests, in which the most wretched atrocity is deemed the most representative social practice. In the same way, it makes no sense whatsoever for Sale to caricature European agronomy in the early modern period as based exclusively on the principle of "warring against species," while non-Europeans idyllically harmonize

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with land and landscape. To clean up the history of the Americas is worse than to ignore it, or to subordinate it to Eurocentric notions of the "primitive"; it is to subject it to a crippling form of moral depletion.

II.

"Ah ... Colon, they [meaning us]... live out your legacy, your destiny, more successfully and more grandly, if more terribly, than you ever could have dreamed." Thus Kirkpatrick Sale, to the shade of the Admiral. Sale is ready to convict Columbus for pretty much everything that has been wrong with the planet from then until now, including the extinction of the Great Auk and the Eskimo curlew, and for all I know Wonderbread and the hole in the ozone layer, too. There is a kind of puritan, brimstone astringency to Sale's book (along with some genuinely wonderful passages of narrative), though it helps at least to cut the treacle of the surviving eulogies.

Paolo Taviani, at the opposite extreme from Sale, seeks to reclaim Columbus from the biographical tradition of the WASPified dauntless mariner invented by Washington Irving and William Prescott and perpetuated by Samuel Eliot Morison. But in so doing he characterizes Columbus not only as "an extraordinary genius," but as an extraordinary Italian genius, one of "a host of Italian geniuses," as a Renaissance prodigy, self-made and self-taught (the latter is certainly true), and worthy to lie in a pantheon with Leonardo and Dante. This may be an ominous sign of things to come: the breast-beating of American self-criticism in 1991 superseded by Hispano-Italian hagiography in 1992, a year already designated as opening a new epoch in European history.

Paradoxically, both the defenders and the prosecutors fight their battles on the same premise, namely that Columbus and 1492 represent, for good or ill, the advent of modernity. This assumption was emblematically expressed by the National Gallery, too, when it decided to conclude its show with a photograph of the Earth from space. And it is also the organizing concept of Barnett Litvinoff's rather plodding book, in which he "seeks to reach down to the stirrings of modernism's miscalculations."

For the eulogists, Columbus was the embodiment of Renaissance empiricism, a mixture of intrepid perseverance, maritime savvy, and colonial acquisitiveness. For the critics, he was an agent of cultural and demographic annihilation. For all of them, however, he was a paradigm of the modern, brutally smashing into fatalistic or innocently traditional worlds. That, everyone seems to agree, was his accomplishment or his offense. And that, to quote Ira Gershwin, is why "they all laughed at Christopher Columbus when he said the world was round."

Now we all know that there was no one of any account in 1492 who did *not* know that the world was round. But the reversal of the commonplace can be taken much further. There are two documents in which Columbus reports that he was indeed laughed at, or at least smiled at. The first is an entry of his diary for December 26, as reproduced (and, as David Henige brilliantly argues, heavily edited) by Las Casas. In this text, the Admiral refers to his request to Ferdinand and Isabella: "I declared to your Majesties that all the profits of my enterprise should be spent in the conquest of Jerusalem. Your Majesties laughed and said it pleased you and even without this you had that strong desire ... "

The second is a letter from the autumn of 1501, between the third and the fourth voyage, written by Columbus from the Carthusian monastery of Nuestra Señora de las Cuevas, in which he bitterly complains that "all who found out about my project denounced it with laughter and ridiculed me." The textbook interpretation of this remark is that the visionary boldness of Columbus's original proposal had been greeted with derision by dug-in conservatives. But the knowledge that we have gained of Columbus's mentality, particularly from recent editions of less well-known documents such as his *Book of Prophecies*, which was written about the same time as his letter, forces us to stand the traditional interpretation on its head.

In fact, it was Columbus's skeptics and inquisitors—from the Portuguese monarch Joaõ II and his Jewish advisers to the Spanish Talavera Commission, which rejected his case in 1492—who should be called the empiricists and the cost-conscious entrepreneurs of practical colonialism, mercantile or religious. After all, what confronted them in the person of Columbus was someone who had the relative magnitude of land masses and the oceans completely wrong; who preposterously abbreviated both the estimate of the globe's circumference and the breadth of the distance from the Canaries to "Cipango" (Japan). For all his years of practical nautical experience, as far east as Chios and as far west into the Atlantic as Ireland and possibly Iceland, Columbus's insistence

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on going west to Cathay represented the subjection of the cumulative and detailed knowledge on portulan charts to the holistic spiritual vision embodied in the *mappamundi* tradition and the ancient maps with Jerusalem at their center. When he finally embarked in the *Santa Maria* at Palos, Columbus was not holding course for modernity. He was sailing away into a fabulous neo-Ptolemaic wonder-world.

A number of the quincentennial biographies recognize the messianic and mythical role that Columbus invented for himself. John Noble Wilford, in a book otherwise oddly adrift between history and historiography, gives the *Book of Prophecies* the full importance it deserves (as does Sale, though for him it is yet more evidence of the apocalypse to be visited on the defenseless indigenes). Felipe Fernández-Armesto, in much the sprightliest and the most acutely intelligent of all the biographies, is likewise most illuminating when he is dealing with the aspects of Columbus's story most amenable to traditional historical analysis. As one might expect from a scholar whose first research was on the colonization of the Canary Islands (a more crucial episode than one might imagine), Fernández-Armesto is wonderfully informative on the sites of colonial preparation (Portuguese Madeira was Columbus's home for many years), and even better on the axis of Genoese commerce and money without which Spanish imperialism would have foundered. Still, he is perhaps too Britishly inclined to make much of Columbus the social climber.

Columbus was indeed obsessed with turning himself and his family into lords, as his other eloquently strange project, *The Book of Privileges*, attests. From the beginning of the Atlantic project, however, there were other, even odder visions that swam in his brain. Going west to go east, Columbus imagined audiences with the "Great Khan" and contacts with the mysterious Christian prince Prester John, which might open a second front against Ottoman Islam. The enterprise of the Indies was about far more than interloping in the Portuguese-dominated spice routes. Its objective was nothing less than the fulfillment of the crusading vocation: the liberation of the Holy Places and the rebuilding of the Holy Temple.

No wonder, then, that Columbus was for so long dismissed as a madman, since in some degree he was one. Indeed, it is his stubborn peculiarity, his remoteness from the self-evident nostrums of European imperialism that make Columbus so complicated and fascinating. So far from seeing his voyages as the inauguration of some expansive and illimitable age, he actually defined their success as hastening the Coming of the Last Days, in an eschatology he took from the Calabrian abbot Joachim of Fiore. His desperate sense of urgency about his enterprise was largely determined by elaborate chronological calculations, based on scriptural reckonings and on the calendar proposed in Pierre d'Ailly's *Imago Mundi*, which told him that in 1492 there were just 155 days left to mankind before the Apocalypse.

"I was not aided by intelligence, by mathematics or by maps," Columbus said in the letter of 1500 to Ferdinand and Isabella that prefaces the *Book of Prophecies*. "It was simply the fulfillment of what Isaiah had prophesied." So much for Columbus the proto-modern man, and so much for the kind of exploration that Ameritech declares, in its supporting publicity for the National Gallery show, "was made possible by art and science."

This does not mean that Columbus's mentality should be conveniently refiled under "anachronisms, medieval," though that would be a less false description than the conventional one. For such a classification begs the large issue of what we imagine the track of modernity, of Western modernity in particular, to

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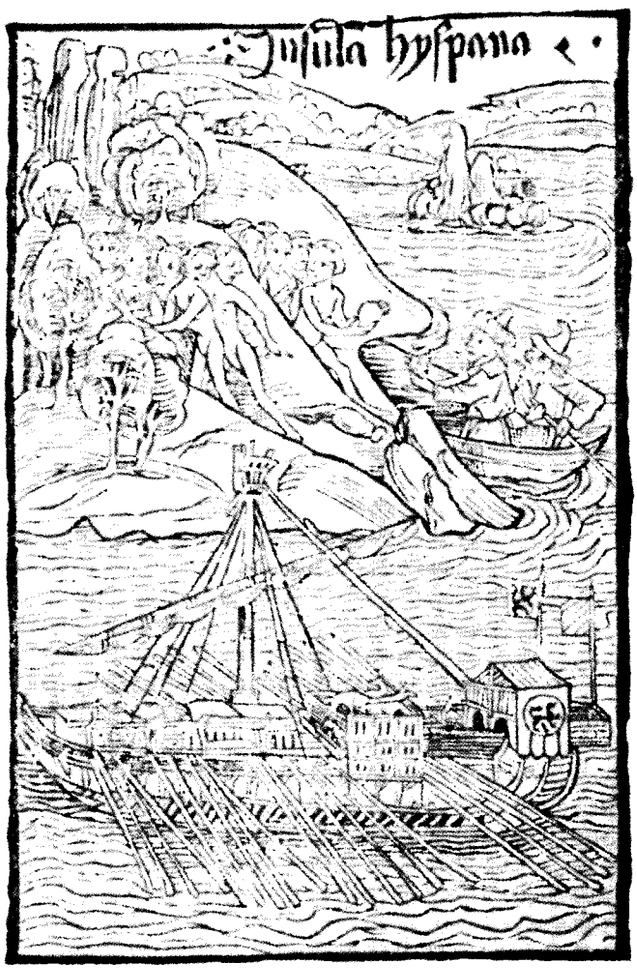
have been. If we assume the course of modernity to have consisted in a long march of Aristotelian objectification, accelerated now and then by Baconian induction, and continuing onward through the Enlightenment to a world governed by the insights of Adam Smith and Charles Darwin, then Columbus may indeed be written off as a cultural freak, and his place in the history books may be judged the result of the wildest contingency: south to the Canaries, turn right, and follow your dream directly to Cathay.

But to see Columbus as owing more to Roger Bacon than to the antecedents of Francis Bacon, as pursuing a mystically charged dream of the Ideal, hoping to bump into Japan and the Terrestrial Paradise on the way, is not at all to write him off. It is to put him, instead, in the company of other neo-Platonist souls whose work we conventionally assume to have modernized our universe, but for whom, by their own lights, astrology meant as much as astronomy. Kepler and Newton in particular would have their tents pitched in the same corner of the Elysian Fields as the star-gazy Admiral.

Thus, in keeping with the neo-Platonist cult of sublime disclosure and revelation, we should perhaps take more seriously Columbus's preoccupation with his own name, and especially with the cryptic way that he encoded it in the mystic triangle that, from 1498 onward, he commanded would be the only way his heirs should sign themselves. Though the precise meaning of the symbol remains obscure, we do know that the Admiral meditated, before his third voyage, on the marvel by which his name appeared to prophesy his life: a perfect neo-Platonist conceit. It was preordained, he believed, that he should be Christoferens, or the Christ-bearer, the carrier of the evangel to the nations of the world. In Spanish, moreover, he was Colon, the populator, not merely with new men but also indigenes who would be made new by their conversion to the true faith. And the name Columbus, most miraculously of all, echoes the apparition of the Holy Spirit, who had appeared to him in the form of a Dove to announce his mission and to declare that his name—that is, interchangeably the dove of the Holy Ghost and the dove Columbus—would resound around the world.

Until quite recently, these mystical and messianic aspects of Columbus's career have been shunted to the margins of the story. From the conventional perspective of colonial history, Columbus's fixation on gold was seen as symptomatic of the conquistadors' self-evident lust for enrichment. What often went overlooked was that Columbus's quest was a product of his celestially revealed certainty that he would locate not just any lode, but the very Mines of King Solomon. Similarly, his hunt for the Terrestrial Paradise, and his conviction during the third voyage in 1498 that he would see it in the form of a nipple raised on the swelling breast of the imperfectly spherical world, has been an embarrassment to historians determined to represent him as the unstoppable force of colonial conquest and enslavement.

A common feature of many histories (including the PBS television series, "Columbus and the Age of Discovery") is to present the development of the journeys from the first to the fourth as a voyage from clear-sighted, empirically informed navigation (even if sailing the wrong way) toward a dark and turbid delirium. Accordingly, with the exception of the Caribbean historian Michael Paiewonsky's fascinating and beautifully produced *Conquest of Eden: 1493-1515*, less attention is paid to the third and fourth voyages, even though it was on the former that Columbus discovered the south American continent and on the latter that he accomplished his most amazing feats of endurance and navigation. In the conventional view, the measure of Columbus's tragedy is the degree to which he comes unhinged, that is, out of time with the lockstep of the proto-modern spirit of the age. It is safe to say that the Admiral did not see things this way.



COLUMBUS'S LANDING (BASEL, 1493)

The John Carter Brown Library at Brown University

Summarily removed from the governorship of Hispaniola in 1500 by Francisco de Bobadilla, who had been sent from Spain at the behest of disaffected colonists, Columbus was manacled and sent home in disgrace. But when the captain of the returning ship offered to remove the chains, Columbus refused, glorying in the fetters that he took to be the attributes of his martyrdom. Brought low in the eyes of the world, he was closer than ever to the apostolic and evangelic consummation that he craved. (In their entertaining and imaginative novel *The Crown of Columbus*, Michael Dorris and Louise Erdrich are exactly on the mark when they turn that golden treasure into a crown of thorns.)

For the most part, though, the *Libro de las Profecias* has until the past few years been dismissed as eccentric gibberish, as the disordered ravings of a defeated mind, as a document of Columbus's declining years. (Catholic propagandists, especially in France in the last century, were alone in finding comfort in its wild-eyed ecumenism.) Only the scholarly work of Pauline Moffatt Watts has taken the text and the other aspects of Columbus's religiosity as seriously as they deserve. Delno C. West and August Kling, the editors of the first English translation of the *Libro*, in an understandably missionary introduction to a superb text, recall that when they went to work on the Spanish version in Princeton, they found the pages of that copy still uncut. It is not too much to say, I think, that

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the publication of their devoted and impeccable research (not to mention the act of faith of the University of Florida Press in giving it such handsome form) is one of the major events of the quincentennial.

The other concentrated act of textual criticism and reconstruction appears in David Henige's *In Search of Columbus*, in which he subjects assumptions about the "Diary" of the first voyage to searching scrutiny. After Henige, that text can no ‹ ger be described with any accuracy as a "log," and its authorship ought more properly be given to Las Casas. The original of the Diary is lost, and all we have had to go on is what Las Casas chose to transcribe. But the doubtful reliability of the Diary only serves to heighten the importance of the *Book of Prophecies* as a source for Columbus's convictions. Together with the *Book of Privileges*, the antiquarian and genealogical work by which he endeavored to make good his claim to a succession of entailed titles and possessions for his heirs, the *Libro* may now be the best guide to Columbus's mental world that we have.

It, too, was largely transcribed, but by his 13-year-old elder son Diego, and then it was reviewed by the Carthusian Father Gorricio; and the prefatory letter containing so many powerful reflections of the Admiral's sense of spiritual invincibility was, Kling and West believe, written in his own hand. Moreover, the objection that the *Book of Prophecies* represents only the Columbus of 1501 may now be set aside, in light of the discovery that in 1481 he wrote four postilles or annotations on scriptural sources in blank pages at the end of his copy of Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini's *Historia Rerum Ubique Gestarum*, a work that, along with d'Ailly's *Imago Mundi*, meant at least as much to him as his famously marked-up copy of Marco Polo or his copy of the Toscanelli-Martins letter on the narrowness of the Atlantic passage. These postilles so exactly anticipate the themes of the *Book of Prophecies* that West and Kling seem quite justified in describing the two documents together as "the bookends around his mind and his discovery."

Nobody in search of Columbus the pioneer of the Renaissance and the vanguard imperialist need repair to this document of 1481, for what they will find there are scraps of biblical authorities from Isaiah and other prophets, the apocryphal Book of Esdras, passages of Flavius Josephus, and an intricate chronology of the Earth. Together, they reveal the true Columbian fixations: the location of a "saving work" in "the middle land of promise"; the mission to extend the evangel among all the peoples of the earth, thus accelerating the desired Last Days; the longing for what Josephus described, in his account of the Solomonic voyages, as "the place called Ophir which is now called Gold Country which is in India," where "precious stones and timbers" could be found to build and to ornament the Temple.

In the *Libro*, as well as in his later correspondence, Columbus was evidently persuaded that Ferdinand was the new David, the Expected King under whose reign the prophecies would be fulfilled, with himself as the designated instrument of providential design. Did he not, after all, bear the crusading title of King of Jerusalem, acquired first through his Aragonese forbears, and later reinforced by acquisition of the Hohenstaufen Emperor Frederick II's Kingdom of Naples? And within such an eschatological mind, as Richard Kagan points out in his exemplary essay in the *Circa 1492* catalog, the other major events of that year—the conquest of Granada and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain—were not simply accidents of chronology. They were linked strategic elements in the building of the new Zion, and therefore of a piece with Columbus's maritime enterprise.

The fall of Boabdil's Moorish citadel on the second day of 1492 was hailed as announcing an *annus mirabilis*. So it must have been of overwhelming significance to Columbus that he was received by the king and the queen at their encampment

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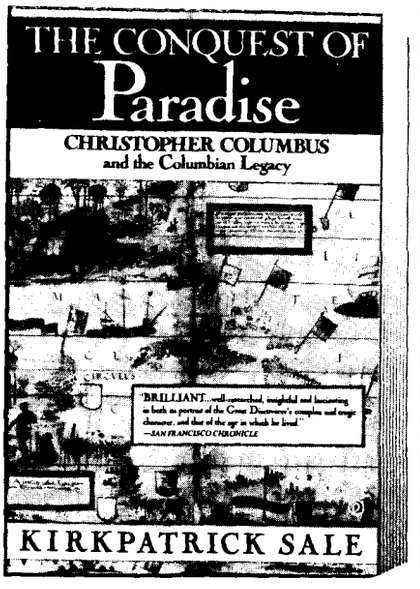

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of Santa Fe, and probably rode into the liberated city in their retinue; and indeed that it was Luis de Santangel, the royal treasurer and convert from Judaism, who finally rescued him from yet another rejection. No wonder, too, that he included another *converso*, Luis de Torres, in his company: Torres was someone who could speak Hebrew and Arabic. He was not (as some have suggested) a poor substitute for someone fluent in Chinese or Japanese, he was an essential companion, because the Admiral may well have expected to end up in some part of the sacred "Middle Land."

In the 1930s Salvador de Madariaga, the Spanish writer and critic, notoriously misinterpreted all these messianic, millennial, and Joachite impulses, these visions of Jerusalem the Golden, as a code for Columbus's own Jewish identity. And following his evidence, Simon Wiesenthal even imagined Columbus's journey to a New Land as a kind of vanguard Zionism for the victims of the Inquisition. All this is preposterous. Though he was unquestionably saturated in scriptural and apocryphal lore, and though his own spiritual personality was built out of the cultural criss-crossings between the Jewish and Christian traditions that characterized much of the mystical and redemptive creeds of the late Middle Ages, including the Observantine Franciscans with whom he was closely associated, there is no doubt that Columbus's zeal was exclusively Christian, and profoundly evangelical in nature.

Nor can there be any question that the literalism of this vision deeply colored both the deeds and the records of his voyages. The texts that may best approximate his self-perception—the famous Barcelona letter of 1493, speedily published as *De Insulis Inventis* just fifty-four days later; passages from Ferdinand's biography (despite being published seventy years after his death); and, for all the heavy freight of its editor's Dominican passion, Las Casas's version of the Diary—all structure their narratives as if they were reporting pilgrimages. The maritime peregrination is punctuated by stations, illuminated by signs and apparitions, animated by miracles, exalted by trials and ordeals. The vast ocean becomes a wilderness; and the Admiral compares himself to Moses, destined to lead a fractious and increasingly unbelieving tribe across its face toward "that land of middle promised for salvation." When he attempts to quiet the unbelievers in the near-mutinous second week of October 1492, he scans the waters, like Noah, for signs of growing things, and for birds, especially for his namesakes the doves; and he is rewarded by the appearance of birds with sprigs in their beak—a sign, if ever there was one, to persevere.

When land is finally sighted, Columbus pre-empts the sailor who claimed the reward for it by insisting that he had first seen the mysterious blue light on the horizon that announced its presence. When the *Santa Maria* is grounded off Hispaniola on Christmas Eve, he recovers from the shock by determining that this, too, must be a divinely expedited message that he should establish a settlement at the exact spot, whence the ill-fated la Navidad, the nativity simultaneously of Christ and of Spanish America. Naming, as Stephen Greenblatt points out in his brilliant and riveting book, was of essential and formative significance for Columbus. San Salvador, the name that he gave to the Taino island of Guanahani on which he made first landfall, declared from the outset the redemptive purpose of the Enterprise of the Indies. And thereafter his names always performed a baptismal or conversionary rite, altering pagan space to sacred space. So the innumerable verdant islands of the western Antilles through which he threaded his way on the second voyage were named the Virgins, for the 11,000 virgins who had been martyred with St. Ursula; and on the third voyage, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, Columbus had a vision of three hills on an island near the mouth of the Orinoco, which he promptly named Trinidad.

The turbulence of the elements was likewise seen as a trial or a punishment. During the fourth voyage, a hurricane from which Columbus's little flotilla narrowly escaped proceeded to devour a great homeward fleet together with his old enemy Bobadilla, who had put him in chains. (The Admiral had advised not to set sail.) It is unlikely that the moral symmetry of the history would have been lost on him. On the violent home journey of the first voyage, Columbus was said (perhaps apocryphally) to have exorcised a waterspout that then passed harmlessly between the *Nina* and the *Pinta*. His response to the terrible storms of February 1493 was to have the crew of the *Nina*, three times on February 14 and once again three weeks later, draw lots of chickpeas, not to cast a propitiatory Jonah into the sea, but to have the fated person swear to perform a pilgrimage to an important shrine should the company survive the ordeal. A single chickpea had been marked with a cross, and three times out of four Columbus drew the pea: an eventuality that Henige has calculated (he is this kind of assiduous scholar, and no mean humorist) as carrying odds of 11,000-to-1. Gadzooks, could this itself have been a prophecy of the isles of the 11,000 virgins?

True or not, the drawing of the holy garbanzos became part of the Columbus lore, and it was used by the Admiral even further to reinforce his faith that he was the specially appointed agent of God's design for the world. In the Barcelona letter he asked, as the most appropriate form of celebration of the first discovery, that "religious letters be solemnized, sacred festivals be held, churches be covered with festive garlands." For "the Eternal God our Lord gives to all those who walk in his way victory over things which appear impossible, and this was notably one," he wrote to Santangel; and later he characterized his whole career as guided directly by *the dove-Spirit "who encouraged me* with a radiance of marvelous illumination from His Sacred Holy Scriptures."

No wonder, then, that the officially stated object of the second voyage in 1493, equipped with six priests along with 1,200 other men in seventeen vessels, was

> to strive by all means to win over the inhabitants of the said islands and mainlands to our Holy Catholic Faith ... to treat the said Indians very well and lovingly and abstain from doing them any injury ... to arrange that both people have much conversation and intimacy each serving the others to the best of their ability ...

Notoriously, of course, the "conversation and intimacy" that the conquistador hidalgos had with the Tainos and the Caribs was loving only in the carnal sense, and the lofty spiritual charge of the enterprise dissolved into a horrific succession of slaughter, servitude, and the increasingly frantic search for the elusive gold mines of Hispaniola. Columbus should certainly not be exonerated for his contribution to this wretched fiasco. If he was a crusader, his crusading personality certainly conformed to its early medieval antecedents, by seeing personal ennoblement and enrichment as the proper reward for courage and risk.

The low point of Columbus's career was certainly his willingness to sanction slavery in Hispaniola. If he attempted, at the beginning, to make a distinction between the bellicose and (as he thought) flesh-eating Caribs, whom he deemed fit for slavery, and the Tainos, whom he wished to make into peaceful converts, this distinction rapidly collapsed with the all-consuming need to have natives produce gold, food, and sex on demand. And Columbus also has been held responsible for the introduc-

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tion of the *encomienda*, or the tribute service by which drafts of native labor were allotted to the conquerors. But Fernández-Armesto stresses the radical novelty of the institution, unknown in both the Spanish Reconquista and the settlement of the Canaries, and argues that it was likely to have come, paradoxically, from the Spanish superimposing their own labor needs, however brutal and unrealistic, on tribute patterns already established in the islands. That there was no single colonial policy or practice that one could properly characterize as purely Spanish was eloquently demonstrated by the shocked Isabella immediately liberating all the slaves who were landed in Spain at the end of the second voyage.

By far the most intellectually gripping and penetrating discussion of the relationship between intruders and natives is provided by Stephen Greenblatt's *Marvelous Possessions*. Nothing else in the entire literature of the quincentennial remotely approaches his vivid engagement with the crucial issue of cross-cultural perceptions. Though Greenblatt addresses himself to works like Tzvetan Todorov's *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, he is mercifully free of the kind of dogmatic critical theory that insists that the essential instrument of conquest was the European possession of written language—an ostensibly anti-colonial view that in fact "privileges" European forms of communication over indigenous hieroglyphs and other systems of signs and utterances. Against this narrow view of the discrepancy between the two kinds of culture, Greenblatt wants to substitute the notion of "marvel" or "wonder" inherited from, but not identical with, the fabulous imaginings of medieval Mandevillean travel literature.

Greenblatt's title is well chosen, for he argues rather paradoxically that it was precisely the sense of wonder that is exemplified by Columbus's description of the first voyage that predisposed the Admiral and the conquistadors to possess these human and topographical treasures. In this respect, they are held to be different from Mandeville, who could produce a literature of gossipy astonishment at, or reluctant admiration of, the natives without any assumption that they were there to be taken. Thus, for Greenblatt, the elaborate rituals of possession—the unfurling of the flag, the reading of the absurd *requerimiento* by which uncomprehending natives were asked if they accepted the true faith—are simply the formulas of covetousness. In one of two brilliant chapters on the Columbian encounter, he shrewdly proposes an ambiguity in the concept of convertibility: it may be applied both to souls and to gold, so that the one in effect could be traded into the other. This, for Greenblatt, was the perfect expression of the peculiar European Christian emphasis on monopolies of faith, land, and belief. "The whole achievement of the discourse of Christian imperialism," he writes, "is to represent desires as convertible and in a constant process of exchange."

Greenblatt, of course, is a founding father of the New Historicism in literary studies, and it may be that this interesting notion of conversion and convertibility suits the New Historicist marriage between economic forms and moral forms a little too well. Still, it is very persuasive, especially when Greenblatt cuts loose of obligations to nod deferentially to colleagues and protagonists in his literary community, and relaxes his vigilance against the "moves," "tactics," and "swerves" that are always said in this kind of work to be behind the construction of narratives. For someone so sensitive to the play of language, though, Greenblatt is occasionally not above playing around with it a little too adroitly himself. Thus, he quotes Columbus in the Diary describing the Taino as "good and intelligent servants for I see that they say everything that is said to them . . . ," and later in the same passage remarking that "no animals did I see on this island except parrots." For Greenblatt, this is equivalent to Columbus equating natives with parrots, even though he nowhere says anything about the birds' capacity for mimicry.

Nine pages later we are told that it was a European characteristic to dismiss the natives as "parrots," but we are then referred to a note featuring an account of a sympathetic advocate of the Indians who reports, no doubt angrily, the reaction of a cardinal who does indeed make the parrot comparison. Thus subtle differences and distinctions that point up the differences in European responses—there was not one European response, there were many—are slid together into one cunning but naughty generalization. Still, the need to keep one's wits sharpened when reading Greenblatt is a mark of the shrewdness, the intelligence, and the energy of the arguments that fill every page.

And yet this marvelous book leaves me wondering about marvels. For where Greenblatt sees Columbus full of a kind of trembling stupefaction, "wonder-thrilling, potentially dangerous, momentarily immobilizing, charged at once with desire, ignorance, fear," I read these same signals as expressions not of disorientation, but quite literally as signs of orientation, or Orientation: of the Admiral's unshakable conviction that he has arrived in the East. In the Barcelona letter to Santangel, for example, his description of the topography and the ethnography of the islands (as J. H. Elliott, who contributes a characteristically elegant and powerful conclusion to the National Gallery catalog, pointed out some years ago in *The Old World and the New*) invoked nothing so much as the terrestrial paradise. So the song of the nightingale, not a species native to America, could be heard "singing in the month of November," and "a great variety of trees stretch up to the stars, the leaves of which I believe are never shed for I saw them as green and flowering as they usually are in Spain in the month of May."

This description is not just an intuitive report from a thunderstruck seaman. It is a text in sacred geography. For in such a paradise, October becomes May, and autumn becomes spring; and spring in Christian metaphor is Easter, the season of resurrection, and green is the color of eternal Hope. And the seven or eight new species of palm tree that Columbus encountered also had numinous meaning: since at least the fifth century, the palm tree, as a tree that was believed to replenish its own leaves, had symbolized not just the Easter victory of Christ over his own death, but also the etymological and metaphorical equivalent of the phoenix.

If we accept a portrait of Columbus not as an embodiment of Renaissance man, but in most ways as the very opposite of Renaissance man, then his manifest incompetence as a colonialist, his arrogance and obtuseness in virtually all aspects of stewardship and government become not only less surprising, but wholly predictable. He could no more govern his staging post to Jerusalem in the Caribbean than the Frankish Kings could govern theirs in Antioch and Edessa. And in this sense it would indeed be better, as the loyal citizens of Palos insist to this day, to acclaim or to execrate Martin Alonso Pinzon as the true inaugurator of the Spanish empire. Certainly Pinzon was the more representative type, as were many who followed in subsequent voyages, including men like Bobadilla, Fonseca, and Roldan, who rapidly became exasperated and alienated by what they took to be the Admiral's disingenuous dithering—by his mercurial swings from sentimentality to brutal rage, his fantastic optimism about Solomon's gold, and the tantalizing closeness of Ophir and Cipango, the arbitrary power he vested in his insufferable brothers, and above all by his will-

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ingness to inflict violent, even capital penalties on Spanish Christians.

Still, for all his editorial license, it is supremely appropriate that it is Las Casas, the conquistador turned holy man and historian, the epitome of passionate indignation at the miseries committed by Europeans against Indians, who nonetheless had no doubt whatever of the significance of Columbus's life and career. For Las Casas, it was not the aggrandizement of the Spanish crown, still less the creation of the colonial class whom he detested, that was the hallmark of Columbus's work. It was rather the ecumenical effect, however tragic, of bringing diverse multitudes within the realm of Christian grace:

> Many times have I wished that God would inspire me again and that I had the eloquence of Cicero to extol the indescribable service to God and to the world which Christopher Columbus rendered at the cost of such pain and dangers when he so courageously discovered the New World with skill and expertise. Is there anything in the world comparable to the opening of the tightly shut doors of an ocean that no one dared enter before?... He showed the way to discoveries of immense territories ... whose peoples form wealthy and illustrious nations of diverse peoples and languages ... and of all the sons of Adam they are now prepared to be brought to the knowledge of their Creator and the faith.

Five hundred years later we may not wish to genuflect before this spiritual hyperbole, though perhaps the cause of understanding Columbus is just as poorly served by turning a deaf ear to its plainsong, as if the conflicts and the passions that sound within it will conveniently go away and spare everyone further embarrassment.

Many of the contemporary anxieties about the Admiral and his accomplishments turn on the assumption that there was an impossibly incommensurable distance between the parties in this cultural encounter. When they faced each other, to be sure, they were as utterly different as any human societies could be, and their mutual incomprehension was indeed a crucial factor in the tragedy that unfolded. Yet the more we know about the wild and wonder-full Columbus, and also about Ponce de Leon and Balboa, the more hidden consonances there seem to be between European and American cosmologies. A truly open-minded cultural pluralism can hardly avoid these intriguing analogies. The Taino vomiting ritual, for example, was the kind of strict ritual practice that devotees of extreme Franciscan forms of mortification might have understood.

It goes against the grain of historical writing to linger unduly on these haunting peculiarities. Most historians of the Renaissance world are attuned more to discussions of cartography or Spanish imperial policy than to daydreams about the proximity of Ophir and the nightmares of Joachim of Fiore. And perhaps it is this quality of the fantastic that is missing from the pages of most of the books of the quincentennial. Even Greenblatt's book, so eloquently concerned with exactly this issue, delivers a discussion rather than an impression of its strange, slightly grotesque quality.

To dive into those realms of wonder, to see the parrots in great dazzling viridian flocks as Columbus did, the quincentennialist in search of the heroically crazed and relentless Admiral needs to see Herzog's *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* again; or better still, to pick up some of the superb novels about the time. Nothing captures the smoke and the horror of 1492, the year of the Jewish catastrophe as well as the Columbian epic, better than Homero Aridjis's overwhelmingly moving novel. And for the experience of a Spaniard possessed by dreams but lost in the rain forest, nothing is more brilliantly textured than Antonio Benitez-Rojo's magnificent (and preposterously overlooked) novel, *Sea of Lentils*:

> So there you are, Anton Babtista, feeling like a duke from the vantage of your lousy hammock, your feet moldering with sores and chiggers, your loins festooned with pustules that all the arboreal waters of the guayacan will never cure; there you are shooting mosquitoes and sweating out the midday fever, underneath the pallium of the branches that you've improvised to overhang your miserable pomp; there you are Anton Babtista, lord and master of unhappy Indians, lord of fear, lord of iron and bad dreams, master of death.

Though John Hemming has given us superb narratives of this experience, of the catastrophe that engulfed the Inca and other Amerindian societies, and though we have more subtle and more penetrating scholarship than ever before, the terrible story of Tenochtitlán in 1519 still awaits its new Prescott. In that terrible and magnificent place, one bellicose and sacrificial culture faced another, one despotism of tribute and service was annihilated by another. Aztec cosmology, trapped within its fifty-two-year fatal cycle, assumed an impending apocalypse when the sun would cease to create new life unless nourished by blood. Christian eschatology, in its most radically millenarian form, assumed a linear destiny in which the whole world would be consumed by fire and sword before a celestial age could dawn.

It is a commonplace now that in Central and South America these cults—the primitive Christian and the native American—have survived the very worst that microbes, social oppression, and economic brutality could have done. Though the cultures of the Taino and the other Arawak are extinct, many other syncretic societies have somehow managed to mutate into forms that reflect the possibility of a shared historical evolution. The outcome of this development, of this mingling of destinies, certainly has many chapters of tragedy ahead of it, most obviously in the Andes, where among the ranks of the Sendero Luminoso a cult of renewal through blood has taken fresh and ominous life. Facing this disaster, however, is a Peruvian president who is an ethnic Japanese: Cipango transported, after all, to the south Atlantic. Columbus had hoped to find the fabled offshore island further to the north, so that in his reckoning America and Japan were the same place. No one, in 1992, is likely to suffer from the same confusion. But the mingling of the destinies continues, and the Admiral's mistaken calculations should not lessen our admiration for the rich bravery of his craziness. •

Triage

Take this piece of bread and crumble it
into so many grains of dirt and take
each grain and blast it into atoms of wind
and recombine the atoms into a woman
walking beside a dried canal and humming
to herself the anthems of her doubt.

Take this cup of wine and scatter the drops
over a field of wild flowers and nettles,
a drop for each bud, two for each barb,
until the noon sun freezes above your head,
and a man made of no luck or memory
forms in your eyes and begins to lie.

Take these two sprung from bread and wine
and put the man to work, the woman
under him for generations or more
until they take dominion everywhere,
beast, bush and bird vanish in wind
and there are nothing but children here.

PHILIP LEVINE

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The Disappearing Act

BY VLADIMIR BUKOVSKY

The August Coup: The Truth and the Lessons by Mikhail Gorbachev

(HarperCollins, 127 pp., $18)

After six years of fighting the Gorbomania of the West, I have given up. God is my witness, I tried everything, from logical persuasion to passionate diatribe, from measured sarcasm to outright insult, all in vain. The more I tried, the less I got published. "He is raving, poor chap, he suffered too much," editors sagely observed as they threw my articles into their wastebaskets.

Meanwhile the mass insanity continued to rage, sparing neither old nor young, neither left nor right, leaving me (and others with views similar to mine) no ground to stand on. A whole library of books extolling Gorbachev's virtues appeared, and to say anything contrary to this common wisdom became almost a sacrilege. So what could I do? In the spirit of the popular American saying—if you can't beat 'em, join 'em—I gave up and repented. Now I admit that I was wrong. Gorbachev is, after all, a great man, a giant of a statesman whose services to humanity are invaluable. For he has a magic touch: whatever he puts his hand on disappears.

As some might still remember, he used to be general secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR. And where, I ask you, is the Party now? Only two years ago he made himself the president of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, that omnipotent nuclear superpower that kept the whole world in trepidation. And where is the Union? And where the Socialist Republics? And where the trepidation?

His miraculous power knows no boundaries. It was enough for him to make a quick trip to Eastern Europe, three times to kiss Honecker, Jakes, Husak, Ceausescu, and the rest of the gang, and they all collapsed, vanishing into thin air along with the Warsaw Pact. If this is not magic, what is? And he did not stop there. He went to China and nearly caused a popular revolution. A few years ago he visited Yugoslavia, praising the "Yugoslav model of socialism" to the heavens, and look what happened to Yugoslavia! Just recently he praised the "Swedish model of socialism," and, lo and behold, only days later the Socialists lost the elections in Sweden. A man of such talents should be encouraged to move around. Since he appears to have lost all his jobs, why not make him head of the Colombian drug cartel or, better still, the next general secretary of the United Nations?

Unfortunately, as his book reveals, Gorbachev does not recognize his real talent. The most striking aspect of the book is its author's incredible modesty. He looks upon himself at best as an innocent bystander, at worst a victim of circumstances; he never quite grasps that he is a mastermind, or the magnitude of the changes that he has masterminded. Throughout the book he keeps talking about the new Union of Sovereign States that he is about to create in place of the old USSR, and about the new socialism that he will soon introduce into that new Union. In these pages he is bursting with creative energy and optimism, even if in reality he has just turned the last page in a climactic chapter of the drama called Communism. As so often happens with historic figures, Gorbachev seems totally unaware that his role has ended, that our Supreme Scriptwriter does not even mention his name in the next chapter.

In Moscow recently I couldn't help recalling an old political joke, popular in the early 1960s. An elderly Russian émigré returns to his homeland in the year 2000, enters a café, and asks a waiter to bring him a cup of coffee and a copy of *Pravda*. "Here is your coffee, sir," says the waiter, "but *Pravda* is not available anymore." "Waiter," persists the old man, "I have asked you to bring me a cup of coffee and *Pravda*." "I am terribly sorry, sir, but I have told you already: *Pravda* is no longer published." The old man refuses to give up. "But I asked you to bring me coffee and *Pravda*!" The waiter begins to lose patience: "I told you, sir, there is no *Pravda*, it is closed, finished. Why do you insist on asking for it?" The old man smiles: "I would like to hear it again, and again, and again . . . "

I have nearly lived this joke myself (with the important difference that in Moscow there was no coffee either). Indeed, it all happened much more quickly than even a joke could foresee. When I first traveled to Moscow last April after fifteen years away, it was still a Communist country, although the power of the Party was openly challenged. The coal miners were striking and demanding Gorbachev's resignation, republics were in revolt against the center, the black market was thriving despite an official crackdown. One could physically feel the growing tension between society and the ruling Party, and it was not difficult to predict an inevitable confrontation. Yet neither side was eager to force the ultimate showdown, fearing a bloodbath. When I returned to the city at the end of August, however, the confrontation was already over. The Party was defeated, its headquarters was closed and sealed, its property was confiscated, and—yes—*Pravda* was temporarily suspended. Whatever might lie ahead, the country was no longer Communist.

Remarkable as it may seem, this historic transition took only three days and only as many human lives. It was a bloodless revolution against the bloodiest political system in history. Ironically, on the night of August 21, 1968, exactly twenty-three years before, Soviet tanks had roared into Prague, crushing the Czech version of perestroika. The scenes that followed were strikingly similar to the scenes that we watched last August on our television screens: angry crowds surrounding tanks on the streets, desperate appeals to the West by the besieged government, impotent and short-lived indignation on the part of the civilized world. Even the tanks seemed similar, or at least they still belonged to the same army. And yet the difference was undeniable: twenty-three years later the Soviet leaders were fighting with their own people on the streets of their own capital for their own survival, instead of carrying out their bold promise to "liberate humanity from the chains of capitalism."

The fact that once again we observed these familiar scenes proved once again what was proved twenty-three years before: socialism cannot be reformed, it cannot evolve into a democracy and a market economy, no matter how cautious the reformers and how gradual the reforms. It is the very principle upon which this system was built that must be changed, and for this reason the old political structures cannot withstand the pressure. Either they crack down or they break down.

In this sense, Gorbachev was no different from other Communist reformers,

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such as Deng Xiaoping in China or Edward Gierek in Poland. They all started with economic reforms and "liberalization," but ended with huge external debts and a popular revolution followed by the predictable imposition of martial law. And like other Communist reformers, Gorbachev has no one but himself to blame for his failure. When he came to power six-and-a-half years ago, he generated immense goodwill. He was instantly credited with a desire to introduce Western-style democracy and a market economy, although he had never promised anything more radical than "democratization" and a "socialist market." But as the failure of his perestroika became apparent, he showed his true face; and finally, in January 1991, he curtailed glasnost, postponed indefinitely any substantial economic reforms, ordered a crackdown on private business activity, robbed old-age pensioners of their life savings, and organized a massacre in the Baltic states. In February both Kiev and Moscow witnessed the first political trials of the glasnost era.

Even the so-called hard-liners who allegedly tried to depose him were handpicked by Gorbachev. Once he decided to reverse his previous policies at the end of the year before, he replaced his less bloodthirsty colleagues in the leadership with real henchmen capable of administering martial law. Then, being true to his indecisive self, he stopped halfway and betrayed them as well, when half a million Muscovites defied his ban on demonstrations and whole regions went on strike in March. Thus he simply fell into the trap that he himself had prepared.

This, I hasten to say, is the kindest, the most sparing, version of the events of August. Many in Moscow believe that Gorbachev was much more actively involved in the so-called coup, if not the mastermind behind it. As quite a few cynics would point out, he had very good reasons to want his immediate subordinates to stage a "coup." Successful or unsuccessful, it would have served his interests. Indeed, as his policy of perestroika was failing, he had no solutions to offer, only some tactical moves and short-term schemes aimed at slowing down the inevitable loss of control over the country. By the end of 1990 there was only one way to avoid civil war in the Soviet Union, and that was to dissolve the Union, just as the only way to avert food riots and strikes followed by repression was to introduce a market economy (and far more radically than was done in Poland). Yet neither of these changes could have been accomplished as long as Gorbachev and his Communist "elite" remained in power. For who would Gorbachev have been in those changed circumstances? A non-elected president of a non-existing country. And where would his elite have been? Standing in line for unemployment benefits.

Instead, borrowing billions of dollars abroad became his only economic policy, a pitiful substitute for real reforms; and all sorts of manipulations aimed at forcing republics to sign his new Union Treaty became a substitute for the task of dissolving the Union. Both these "policies," however, required a considerable element of disinformation for their success. The threat of a coup by "hard-liners" was exactly the legend that made the West support Gorbachev through all six years of perestroika, and the same threat was used by Gorbachev's propaganda to secure the support of the democrats at home.

By August 1991, however, Gorbachev and his comrades were running out of tricks, and the people were running out of patience. The economic summit in London was a disaster for Gorbachev: no new credits were offered, all the usual scares notwithstanding. At home, the prospects of getting the republics to sign the new Union Treaty were slimmer every day, particularly as the Ukraine, the biggest and by far the most important republic, openly refused. Clearly, the bugaboo of a hard-liners' coup was loosing its power to motivate. Stronger medicine, an even more credible warning of disaster, was necessary.

In sum: "the August coup" was, in all probability, not a coup at all, but rather the introduction of martial law disguised as a coup. Gorbachev, of course, could not afford to be seen as its leader, and preferred to stay in the shadow. Had it succeeded, he would certainly have re-emerged from his Crimean retreat as a force for moderation, with his power at least partially restored; and should this strangest coup in history have failed, as of course it did, he would appear to the world as a victim who must be saved from the clutches of the "hard-liners" for another six years. Whatever the case, whether he encouraged the plot or not, Gorbachev could not possibly have been uninformed about the preparations for such a giant operation, particularly since many of his closest aides were involved.

Perhaps the strangest aspect of the coup was the behavior of the alleged conspirators. Unlike their Polish colleagues in 1981, they did not close down the country, did not cut communications, did not arrest the most active opponents (especially Yeltsin). Instead they moved tanks into Moscow, thus provoking resentment at home and an outcry abroad, and they called a press conference for which they were comically ill-prepared. Whatever we may think about the intellectual ability of these officials, we can hardly deny them experience in their respective fields of government. These were the people, I believe, who masterminded a brilliant coup in neighboring Romania just two years ago. If a coup is what they wanted, they knew how to stage one.

Moreover, their persistent claim that Gorbachev was just ill, and would be back as soon as he was better, was completely inconsistent with the very notion of a coup. Those who intend to replace a head of state usually do not promise his return. And certainly they do not hurry to their alleged victim once they have failed. Admittedly, we do not know what Gorbachev and the plotters discussed at their reunion in Crimea, but the scene is not hard to imagine.

"You fools, I told you to act without me. Why did you come here?"

"But, Mikhail Sergeyevich, what should we do now? You told us to act without you, but the army refuses to obey our orders unless you confirm them. You told us to make it bloodless, but the crowds surrounded the White House and we cannot take it without massive casualties. Please, come with us. You promised to come a few days later anyway. Please make up your mind: Do you want martial law or not?"

"You idiots! What are you talking about? I did not say anything about martial law, did I?"

I appreciate that such a scene may seem farfetched to an outsider, but such a pattern of behavior is typical of Gorbachev. He claimed, for example, that he did not know anything about the Tbilisi massacre in 1989, and even punished the local commander, but a year later it was revealed that he took part in a Politburo discussion of possible military action. The same story was repeated in 1990 in Baku and in 1991 in Vilnius, and each time Gorbachev officially did not know anything about it. Small wonder that his generals refused to obey when it was Moscow's turn last August.

It is also typical of Gorbachev to believe that strategic problems can be solved by tactical schemes, most of which at the end turn out to be too clever for his own good. Thus, he certainly did not want to destroy the Eastern European Communist regimes, nor did he plan to hand East Germany over to NATO on a silver platter. Quite the

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contrary, he wanted to replace "hard-core" Communist leaders there with little Gorbachevs. But after a spectacular beginning, the outcome of his European gambit was a complete disaster for the Kremlin strategists. No analyst at the KGB could fathom the depth of the mistrust and the hatred that the people of Eastern Europe felt for any Communist leader, "liberal" or "conservative." Their new puppets could not possibly "stabilize" Eastern Europe and salvage the ruse of socialism by promising to give it a "human face."

Crazy schemes that go wrong seem to be Gorbachev's trademark. And, come to think of it, wasn't the whole policy of perestroika one such crazy scheme, an attempt to solve a strategic problem by tactical means? As a result, what was originally intended as an internal readjustment of the system grew into a popular revolution that threatened to bring the system down. And the phony coup that ultimately brought it down was only the logical conclusion of the policy of deceit and manipulation.

There is nothing unusual in such a development; Tocqueville observed long ago that the most dangerous moment for a despotic government is when it begins to change. Like so many reforming despots before him, Gorbachev and his colleagues made two basic miscalculations: they overestimated the strength of the ruling party and they underestimated the people's hatred of the old regime. That is to say, if we owe anyone a debt of gratitude for the spectacular changes in the East, we owe it to the people, not to the despots.

These were the truths and the lessons of the events in August, but you will not discover them in Gorbachev's latest memoir. In fact, only a few pages, twelve and a half to be precise, are devoted to a description of the actual events, and even those pages are mostly dedicated to proving his innocence or to refuting the "allegations." The text of his "Declaration," ostensibly written on August 20 to protest the action of the "conspirators"; the description of the way he videotaped his statement and listened to the foreign broadcasts; his preoccupation with a speech he was expected to make before the putsch: all are aimed at convincing his readers of how monumentally unaware he was of the impending drama, and how heroically he resisted the evil plans of the plotters. He writes that

> the forces that have been defeated will try to think up all kinds of things. They will produce the crudest inventions, try to cast suspicions on the president and the democratic forces, and to compromise them.
>
> Here is one story that is going round: it suggests that I knew in advance about the putsch, and is based on a reference to the interview given by Lukyanov [Speaker of the Supreme Soviet] on 19 August. The investigation will reveal everything, including the value to be attached to the rumor being put about suggesting that Gorbachev's communications were not cut off, but that he kept out of the way so as to sit it out and then to arrive "ready to serve." A "no-lose" situation, so to speak. If the coup succeeded, then the president, having given them the chance, would win out. If the coup failed, he would again be right. Similar lies are being spread from various sides. Incidentally, on 18 August, when he was trying to get me to agree to order a state of emergency or hand over to Yanayev, Baklanov argued in the same spirit as the present character assassins. Appealing to me to support the Committee, he said: "You take a rest and while you are away we'll do the 'dirty work' and you will return to Moscow." A strange coincidence, is it not? But if those three days failed to unsettle me it certainly won't happen now.

The trouble, of course, is that we were not present when these conversations supposedly took place, and we are expected to accept Gorbachev's word for it. Meanwhile Lukyanov is paralyzed

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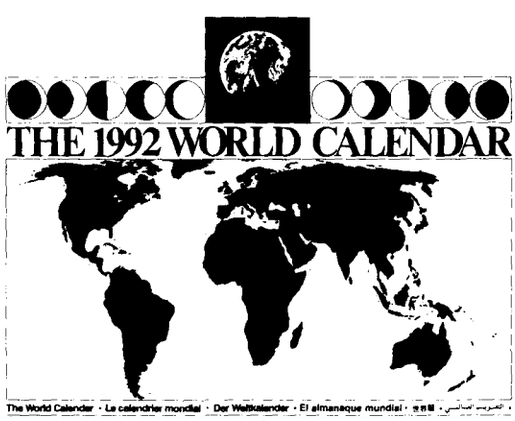
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after a stroke he suffered in custody, and many others of Gorbachev's confidants have died in a chain of enigmatic suicides. One wonders how much that is really new will be "revealed" when the investigation is over.

One is also left to wonder what is the purpose of this book, if it is not to provide a thinly veiled apologia for Gorbachev's complicity in the whole affair. For apart from endless banalities about "cooperation," "progress," and "opportunities," the constant theme of the book is Gorbachev's future relationship with the West, and his hope that it will not abandon its hero in his dark hour:

> I hope that now the West will pay greater attention to what I have said insistently and frequently in calling for practical and productive collaboration with our country.... The only thing that has to be remembered is that, at the present stage of rapid transition to the free market and of stabilizing measures, we need understanding on the part of the West, especially of Europe, and their readiness to meet us halfway as much as possible.

In other words, Gorbachev hopes that now, unlike last July in London, the West will bail him out, and without asking awkward questions. This seems to be so important to him that he keeps forgetting how much the world changed during those three August days. He keeps forgetting, that is, that there is no Communist Party anymore, no Soviet Union, no Warsaw Pact, nothing with which the West can have a relationship; that, in short, he himself became irrelevant, while the new forces took over.

With or without Gorbachev's active participation, indeed, this strange coup was a blessing in disguise, because it precipitated the inevitable collapse of communism. In the final analysis the people won, as they did in the other conflicts of this nature, be they in Budapest or Prague or Moscow. They, and not the Communist reformers like Dubček or Gierek, Deng or Gorbachev, are the heroes. And what they achieved at the end was a moral victory, without which no true recovery is possible. For only those who regain their dignity can build a new society.

Three days and three nights in August did for the nation what all six years of perestroika could not. They purified the conscience and destroyed the mean spirit of slavery, as hundreds of thousands, if not millions, across the country decided that they would rather be dead than red again. New generations, previously apolitical and socially indifferent, entered the scene and pushed aside the fears that burdened the older generations. One can observe a new expression on their faces, and it is an expression of self-respect.

Now at last we can be sure of our future, for only those who have liberated themselves can erect an edifice of democracy on the ruins of a totalitarian state. As for Comrade Gorbachev, we will always remember him with sadness, as we remember Louis XVI or Nicholas II. And we will always feel inexplicable gratitude to this miracle man, for accomplishing what all the Western policies, from containment to appeasement, failed to accomplish.

VLADIMIR BUKOVSKY is the author most recently of *USSR: From Utopia to Disaster* (Robert Laffont).

Two Cheers for Prettiness

BY AMY CLAMPITT

Edna St. Vincent Millay, Selected Poems: The Centenary Edition edited and with an introduction by Colin Falck

(HarperCollins, 163 pp., $17.95)

Bemusingly, another centenary is upon us. T.S. Eliot's hundredth anniversary in 1988 was preceded by Marianne Moore's (1987), Ezra Pound's (1985), and William Carlos Williams's (1983). Trailing in the dust stirred up by these certifiably modern poets, all of whom in fact outlived her, Edna St. Vincent Millay is of interest because she had so little to do with any of them. When she died in 1950 at the age of 58, her once considerable reputation was already dwindling. But her *Collected Poems* have remained in print, as have two smaller volumes of sonnets and lyrics respectively. Clearly she has never lacked for readers, and it may be that she appeals to those readers for the very reason that in other circles she is referred to dismissively if at all. Whatever else may be said of it, the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay is *not* modern.

When the literary and aesthetic fault line that opened around 1912 is considered, Millay appears as exemplary of the right as Williams is of the left. That he is her elder by nine years is hardly believable: one thinks of him as younger to the very end than she had been from the beginning. There is no record that he ever met her. Robert McAlmon, an intimate of his, evidently did: in a now forgotten novel he sneered at "that lady poetess Vere St. Vitus—the jumpy cooey little thing." In her turn, Millay had a sneer or two for the 1913 Armory show: cubist art, she declared, looked like "a pile of shingles," and she defied a correspondent to whom she sent a postcard of Marcel Duchamp's furor-causing nude to draw a line around the figure in it. The end of her career would find her writing, unrepentant if defensive, of "the fashion now to wave aside" what "does not ... excite / To some subversion."

Subversion, then, had something to do with what Millay was not—a multiplicity of subversions that left a mere observer in the position of those aunts of Miss Nancy Ellicott, of whose behavior Eliot wrote that "they knew that it was Modern." Still, the fault line that opened in 1912, and has been no more than precariously spanned from that day to this, cannot be neatly mapped. Though Pound and Millay, for example, appear never to have met—she failed to seek him out during the year or two they were both in Paris—the two poets have in common rather more than one tends to assume:

> Where is he now, in his soiled shirt
> reeking of garlic,
> Sculling his sampan home, and night
> approaching fast—
> The red sail hanging wrinkled on the
> bamboo mast;
>
> Where is he now, I shall remember my
> whole life long
> with love and praise, for the sake of a
> small song
> Played on a Chinese flute? ...

Titled "For Pao-Chin, A Boatman in the Yellow Sea," the poem just quoted is from Millay's 1928 collection, *The Buck in the Snow*. She could have been familiar with Pound's renderings of someone's translations from the Chinese; but one can't be sure of that, and in any event what we have here is something more than a literary imitation. Pao-Chin was an actual boatman whom Millay and her husband encountered during a trip around the world. Her having written about him is less of an affectation, less "literary," than Pound's versions of

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Li-Po were bound to be.

Still, for the most part, Millay belongs on the other side of the fault line. The *Collected Prose* of Marianne Moore, rife though it is with the names of minor, marginal, and in many instances by now forgotten poets, contains not one mention of Millay. Perhaps Moore's letters will one day enlighten us; meanwhile it is easy to guess that the figure of the female poet lampooned by McAlmon was precisely what Moore with all her heart and soul would have shunned. "Feeling at its deepest," she observed, "tends to be inarticulate."

As one all but preternaturally on guard where those depths were concerned, Moore would not have countenanced the facile melody of "What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why, / I have forgotten ..." Any reader not carried away by that melody might be inclined to demur: Oh, come on, Edna, haven't you got it all written down somewhere? Even so, for many readers, this is the kind of thing that has been and remains what they expect poetry to be. That line and a half begin one of Millay's most famous sonnets, perhaps indeed one of her best, though it is derivative in the extreme:

> Thus in the winter stands the lonely tree,
> Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,
> Yet knows its boughs more silent than before ...

The borrowing here in the sestet is somehow to the poem's advantage, as the greater music of "That time of year thou mayst in me behold / When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang ..." is heard through the frank homage of the lesser.

For some, to find pleasure in such borrowing is reprehensible. Clearly, the young Millay had no such qualms. As a child in omnivorously bookish isolation, she had devoured the poetry of Shakespeare. Abbie Huston Evans, herself a not inconsiderable poet (whose work some readers may indeed prefer), was her Sunday school teacher. It may well be that poetry imbibed so early sets up certain expectations in the very mechanism of one's hearing, and thus in the shaping of the sensibility. For Moore as a child, the reading of poetry seems not to have been very important. For Williams, the door did not open until his seventeenth year, when (he tells us) for the first time he "actually looked at a poem." As a medical student he discovered Keats, whose influence he would then vehemently repudiate. The problem he had begun to wrestle with, and with which he can be said to have gone on wrestling for life, was one so unwieldy that he could hardly define it, though in his frenetic, rollicking, cantankerous way he often tried. "Truly," he wrote once, "the world is full of emotion—more or less—but it is caught in bewilderment to a far more important degree."

Caught in bewilderment we all are to this day. Eliot would write of being impelled "to purify the dialect of the tribe." But the phrase came from Mallarmé, who had famously said that a poem was made of nothing but words—and by now an impenetrable thicket of writing surrounds us, sprung from and rooted in that wordy notion. If poetry is words and nothing but, then why not pretty words? When I was 15 or so, as I recall, Edna St. Vincent Millay was one of my favorite poets. The other one was Swinburne. In the work of both, pretty sounds were what attracted me—pretty sounds being literary ones:

> And the brown bright nightingale amorous
> Is half assuaged for Itylus
> For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces ...

About just such stuff, Pound would seem to have been explicit: "Every literaryism, every book word, fritters away a scrap of the reader's patience, a scrap of his sense of your own sincerity."

Well, maybe. Edna Millay grew up with book words and literaryisms. "Renascence," the long poem that appeared in the fault-line year of 1912, and made her in a way famous, is full of the "hath"s and "lo"s and "I know not"s to whose extirpation Pound had by then committed himself, if without complete success even in his own backyard. The final poem in Millay's posthumously issued last collection has for its opening line, "What rider spurs him from the darkening east"—a locution just as bookish as what she'd started out with. Throwing out everything that could possibly be labeled secondhand or insincere calls for an effort that can bring on paralysis. Perhaps Moore came nearer than anyone else, though in her later years she, too, could be seen as having lapsed. Williams, who often professed admiration for her method, admitted also that he found the results puzzling. So must we all, if we're quite truthful. In the demands she makes on her readers she is perhaps the ultimate modern poet—everything that Millay was not.

Millay is not puzzling. She makes no real demand on her readers: an obscure word now and then, an occasional classical reference slip past unobtrusively, so that one hardly feels obliged to look them up. The pleasures offered are, after all, mainly to the ear. But not altogether. It is instructive to come upon the following, in a posthumously published "Journal":

> Now, I could very easily tell
> An apple-orchard by the smell,
> And in my mind's eye see again
> The rough bark blackened by the rain
> And glistening, and the hardy big
> Red and white blossoms on the twig.
>
> But nothing could recall the sound
> Of apples falling on the ground ...

Something comes through here, in what is hardly more than a jotting, of Millay at her best: a sensuous freshness that slips in and out of her work as regularly as the tide, inundating the formal music of her work with a vigor and a specificity from beyond itself.

It can be no accident that the freshness derives as often as not from the poet's seaside childhood in Camden, Maine:

> Hearing your words, and not a word among them
> Tuned to my liking, on a salty day
> When inland woods were pushed by winds that flung them
> Hissing to leeward like a ton of spray,
> I thought how off Matinicus the tide
> Came pounding in, came running through the Gut
> While from the Rock the warning whistle cried,
> And children whimpered, and the doors blew shut ...

That is from *Fatal Interview*, a sonnet sequence. Other poems in other forms—the rapid quatrains of "Inland," and a large number in the looser stanza form, with freely varying line lengths, that she favored as time went on—tend to support the view that Millay was most herself when she dealt with her experience of natural scenes and places. "Above These Cares" and "Ragged Island" may be singled out among those included by Colin Falck in his selection for this centenary edition. Many others do not appear—so many that to me the whole reads more like a sampler than a truly representative collection. It is good to find *Sonnets from an Ungrafted Tree*, the sequence that most consistently brings sensuous immediacy to her handling of the form, given almost entire (three out of seventeen, and those clearly the weakest, have been omitted). But of the later, once notorious *Fatal Interview*, no more than three out of well over 100 sonnets have been deemed indispensable, and they are by no means enough even to begin to suggest the real character of the whole. The concluding

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"Oh, sleep forever in the Latmian cave," whose familiarity alone would argue for its being kept, has been omitted. If the intent of such rigorous selectivity was to improve Millay's chances in some ultimate lyric-poetical sweepstakes, it has been a mistake.

She has been just as ill served in her role as mouthpiece for the unconventional if not exactly liberated woman, at a time when such a woman found things a good deal harder than now. For all the book words and Très-Riches-Heures imagery, *Fatal Interview* had its forthright moments. More forthright still are a number of later poems, written in the cadenced stanzas that permitted far greater spontaneity than the sonnet, whose candor is very much in the mode of Anne Sexton. Several of these have been included by Falck: "The Fitting," "Intention to Escape from Him," and "Rendezvous," with its concluding

> But I am perverse; I wish you had not
> scrubbed—with pumice, I suppose—
> The tobacco stains from your beautiful
> fingers. And I wish I did not feel like
> your mother.

Others equally telling, to my mind, (including one titled "Menses") have been dropped. Room has been found instead, for example, for the whining note—"Importuned through the mails, accosted over the telephone, overtaken by running footsteps, caught by the sleeve, the servant of strangers"—of "Cave Canem"; and the likewise trivial sneer (in an untitled late piece beginning, "How innocent we lie among / The righteous") at "What's illy done and done in haste / By licensed folk on every side." Such samples left one reader with a querulous aftertaste and a feeling of disappointment: so *that* was all my idol amounted to.

Taking up the *Collected Poems* for a more extended look, I came with a start upon "The Cameo," which I now remembered having read at 15, though it had been decades since I last looked at it:

> Forever over now, forever, forever gone
> That day. Clear and diminished like a
> scene
> Carven in cameo, the lighthouse, and the
> cove between
> The sandy cliffs, and the boat drawn up on
> the beach;
> And the long skirt of a lady innocent and
> young,
> Her hand resting on her bosom, her head
> hung;
> And the figure of a man in earnest speech.
>
> Clear and diminished like a scene cut in
> cameo
> The lighthouse, and the boat on the
> beach, and the two shapes
> Of the woman and the man; lost like the
> lost day
> Are the words that passed, and the pain,—
> discarded, cut away
> From the stone, as from memory the heat
> of the tears escapes.
>
> O troubled forms, O early love
> unfortunate and hard,
> Time has estranged you into a jewel cold
> and pure;
> From the action of the waves and from the
> action of sorrow forever secure,
> White against a ruddy cliff you stand,
> chalcedony on sard.

This is quintessential Millay: the theme of memory, the coastal setting, the marmoreal clarity, the formality, the music. When I first encountered it, the alliterative chord of that "chalcedony on sard" was what found its way into some minor recess of my brain. Did I look up those unfamiliar words, or simply guess that they were the names of gemstones used in the making of cameos? At any rate, this poem is one of dozens that to my mind might have been included in a centennial volume, but were not.

The art of the cameo—with whose processes the poem embodies an unobtrusive familiarity—has something in common with the formal poetry at which Millay excelled. The effects produced by it are limited. The bewilderments clutched at and grappled with by Williams are beyond the ordering of anything so brittle. There is hardly any room for ambiguity of thought or feeling—for anything that critical analysis might take hold of or take apart. Yet, as I say, it appears to be for these very reasons that the poems of Millay continue to be read, presumably by those who find incomprehensible the work of those moderns who were her contemporaries. With interest in poetry of any kind apparently on the wane, while a new kind of specialization moves in to displace it, these readers cannot be written off as irrelevant. Literate people, who—as Mark Strand poignantly reminds us in a recent essay—may include a poet's own family, often do not read poetry; or if they do, they are made uneasy by it.

A year or two ago I found myself taking part in one of those panel discussions that are supposed to enlighten the general public concerning the state of poetry in America. Given the anarchy that now prevails, it is hardly possible to generalize from what I heard that evening, except to note that all of us on the panel were evidently in revolt against one and the same thing, and that thing was, in a word, consumerism. But unlike the extremes of silliness that were born of the Dadaist revolt, or the showily dangerous excesses of Pound at his most egregious, the noise made by poets nowadays is a mere cacophony of internal squabbling that has become almost routine. Hardly anybody seems to believe that there might still be a reading public, as distinguished from the well-defined clique or interest group.

For some, to be at all wistful for such a public is tantamount to a belief in the sanctity of market forces. I very much doubt that even such as are pleased to be known as the New Formalists are the captives of any particular economic view; in any event, having the temerity to speak of such a public ought not to be merely sneered at. Whether there is such a thing as a New Formalist position on Edna St. Vincent Millay I am not sure, and would be interested to know. But after something like half a century, her poems are in print and selling steadily, without benefit of the prestige that has kept those of Marianne Moore in print, however impenetrably odd some readers may find them. No less odd, come to think of it, is the distance between a Presbyterian decorum so extreme as to bridle at the name of Walt Whitman—"Don't speak to me of that man!" Moore once exclaimed—and the concurrent flaunting of those squandered kisses, that candle burning at both ends. If the poetry of this century should add up to one anarchic free-for-all, with no marshaling of right and left, no final division of sheep from goats, that very distance may turn out to have been a vital sign.

AMY CLAMPITT is the author of four books of poems and, most recently, of *Predecessors, Et Cetera* (University of Michigan Press), a book of essays.

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Abracadabrant

IT IS ALMOST EVERY WEEK NOW that I pity the poor immigrant. In Germany, naturally, about which my expectations are low (I hear assurances that neo-Nazism is an excrescence of the fringe, but I do not hear reflections on the historical relationship of German democracy to German prosperity), and in France, about which my expectations are only slightly higher, since it was there that uniformity as a condition of citizenship, and self-love as a basis for nationalism, caused the least nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anguish. Was I wrong, however, to expect a little more of England, that island of negative liberty in a sea of ends of history, where the ideal of tolerance received its purest and sharpest formulations, and an intimacy with the other was one of the unwittingly humanizing consequences of imperialism? But I read the *Spectator* of London, and the scales fall from my eyes.

THE 'SPECTATOR' IS THE MOST intellectually lazy journal of intellectuals in its language, and so it has a certain usefulness: things are blurted out, prejudices are delivered under the mistaken impression that they are ideas. In recent months it has published two extraordinary attacks on immigrants, one in the name of democracy, by Stephen Spender, the other in the name of nationalism, by Charles Moore. Arguing bizarrely against Salman Rushdie that "it is mass immigration that has got him into the trouble in which he now finds himself," Spender wrote:

> One cannot take it for granted that a global population hotch-potch of the kind which Mr. Rushdie envisages would be a world safe not just for him, but for democracy. Democracy is threatened in many countries now by immigration, partly because immigration provokes the most reactionary forces in the countries now receiving immigrants (le Pen in France, neo-Nazis in Germany, neo-Fascists in Italy), partly because the immigrants themselves are by no means always upholders of democracy.

SPENDER HAS MADE A CAREER AS A witness of the intolerance of his time. Is *this* what he learned? Let us gloss that last sentence, then, proposition by proposition. First, democracy is not threatened by strangers, it is threatened by the refusal to accept strangers, and to treat them fairly; and by the horror of their difference. Second, there are not lynchings because there are blacks, there are not pogroms because there are Jews, and there are not rapes because there are women. The object of a hatred is not the origin of a hatred. "Reactionary forces" are not reacting at all, they are seizing an opportunity to act on a desire. Third, democrats are not born, they are made. Democracy is an instruction, a taught discipline, and the instincts that it inhibits are common to human clay. The Muslims of England are not a danger to democracy because the Muslims of Bradford behaved undemocratically. Anyway, is this sort of generalization really in the interest of a man who lived in the imperialist and fascist and Communist years of his civilization's history?

BUT MOORE IS worse, much worse. What follows appeared on October 19, 1991:

> You can be British without speaking English or being Christian or being white, but nevertheless Britain is basically English-speaking and Christian and white, and if one starts to think that it might become urdu-speaking [sic] and Muslim and brown, one gets frightened and angry.
>
> Next door to me live [sic] a large family of Muslims from the Indian subcontinent. We are friendly enough to one another and they have done us various small acts of kindness. During the Gulf war, however, I heard their morning prayers coming through the wall, and I felt a little uneasy. If such people had outnumbered whites in our square, I should have felt alarmed. Such feelings are not only natural, surely—they are right. You ought to have a sense of your identity, and part of that sense derives from your nation and your race. . . .
>
> We want foreigners so long as their foreignness is not overwhelming. Mr David Mellor, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, wants a Russian couple to be allowed to live here because he loves music and they are distinguished composers. This is the right attitude. . . .

Three cheers, I say, for the neighbors. I hope that they pray noisily, and that they pray five times a day, and that the evening prayer comes just as the Moores and the Mellors are turning to the claret.

IT IS AMUSING TO WATCH THE colonizers complain about being colonized. But the wit of history is not the whole tale. Moore, remember, is the journalist who asked John Major how a man of his class felt to be prime minister. This is a man with an identity. Yet still he lives with the shades pulled down. Why is he so anxious? Why, if his identity is so strong, is his identity so weak? I suspect, and not only about Moore, that the truth is the other way around. His fear is not owed to his identity. His identity is owed to his fear. It is not a sign of strength in your self that you need to attach it to the color of your skin, or to your flag. All these attributes bespeak a lack, a hole, an indigence. Of course, membership in groups and institutions is a fated and sometimes amplifying feature of selfhood; but selfhood is not essentially a matter of membership.

FOR THE SELF THAT IS merely a member, however, foreignness will always be overwhelming, and aliens will always seem "abracadabrant," as a flummoxed Henry James, the patron saint of the higher nativism, called the immigrants of Manhattan. In America, of course, nativism is particularly preposterous, since there is not a man or woman in this society, with the exception of the saving remnants of, well, the Native Americans, who can cast the stone. Here nativism is the sheerest hypocrisy, a mean fantasy of pulling the ladder up behind you. Still, as American pluralism devolves merrily into American tribalism, and the economy goes to the dogs, immigrants are once again becoming an American alibi. Duke and Buchanan, as a friend of mine put it, vie to split the Nazi vote; and Haitians are crowded behind barbed wire as the president considers forced repatriation; and the governor of California, who was supposed to be resurrecting liberal Republicanism, worries that the "magnetic effect" of the state upon immigrants is responsible for its fiscal difficulties.

I UNDERSTAND THAT THE LATE twentieth-century immigration to a welfare state differs from the late nineteenth-century immigration to a social Darwinian state, that dependence is more easily acquired in America now. But dependence is what most immigrants seek to lose, not what they seek to find. Movement, after all, is evidence of energy, and of a belief in betterment. And I understand, too, that not all immigrants are refugees. A lot of them do not need to come here. They merely want to come here. And that is precisely why we should open our doors to them, and keep the ladder down.

LEON WIESELTIER

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